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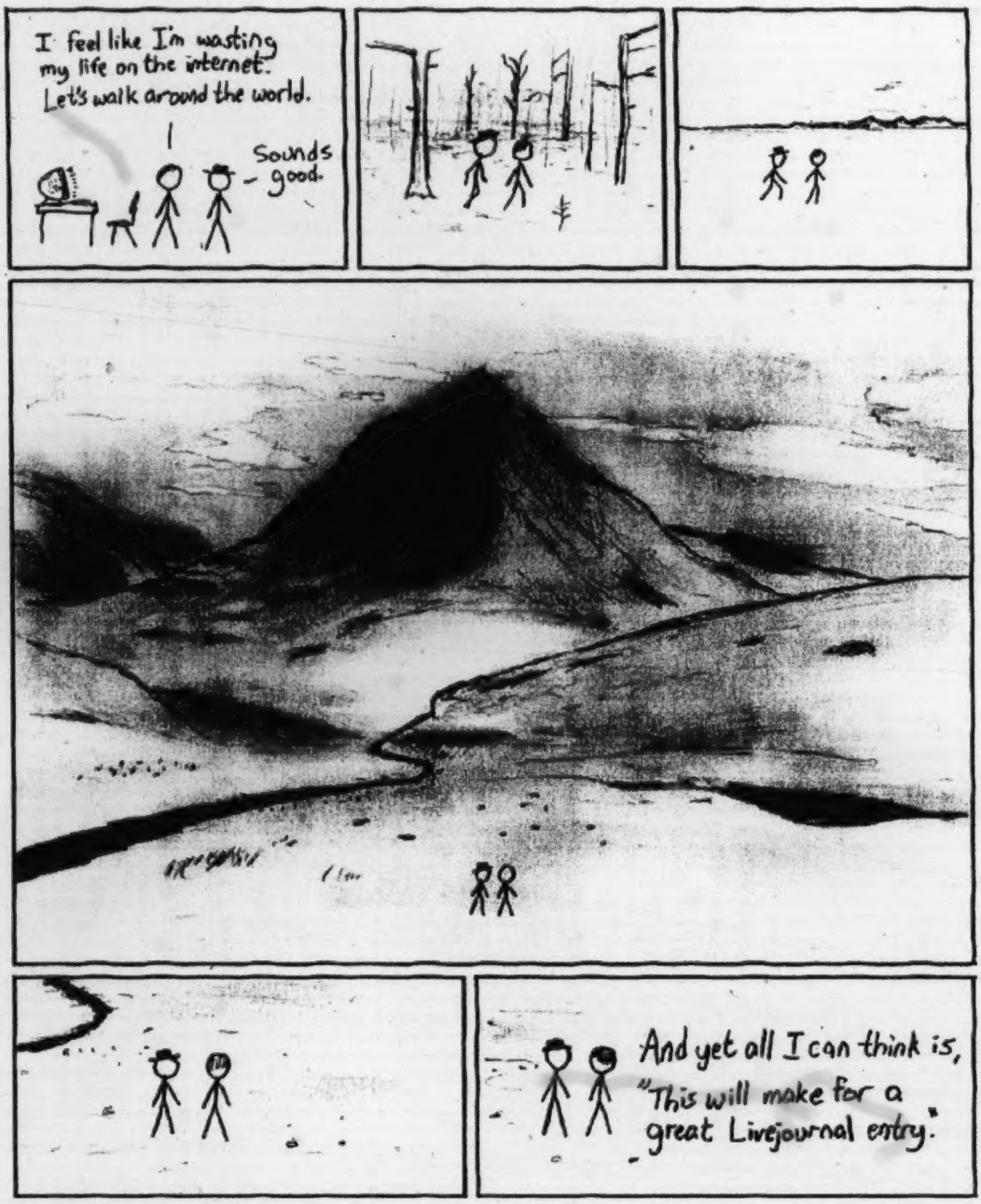
I feel like I'm wasting my life on the internet. Let's walk around the world.
Sounds good.
And yet all I can think is, "This will make for a great Livejournal entry."

Source: Randall Munroe "Bored with the Internet" XKCD. http://xkcd.com/77/ Used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.5 License.

University of Alberta

The effect of adding a zero: the blog and identity

by

Darren James Harkness

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Humanities Computing

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2008

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395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-45732-0
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-45732-0

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This work is dedicated to the ground beneath my feet and the stars above my head.

Abstract

Critics of blogging have focused on the blog as a site of autobiographical discourse. Although this approach is useful, it misses a deeper discussion of the influence of the community around a given blog, the blogger, and the software itself in directing the growth of the blogger's identity. In exploring these influences, this thesis ties together an in-depth look at the infrastructure within the blog and its influence in directing the type of content a blogger generates with a theoretical approach, using a combination of humanist and posthumanist theory to discuss the effects of encoding/decoding and subject position on a blogger's identity.

Acknowledgements

No academic works in a vacuum; this work, like all academic writing, owes its existence to a great many people. So many people have heard me ramble – coherently and otherwise – about the themes in this work, and I thank all of them for listening to me and smiling politely.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Julie Rak, whose patience and gentle steering were invaluable in seeing the completion of this work. She gave me the freedom to explore. I would also like to thank Dr. Harvey Quamen for introducing me to the posthuman, which helped fill in the holes Lacan could not, and Dr. David Miall for bringing his experience in hypertext readings to this committee.

I would like to thank my parents, Barry and Lynette Harkness for instilling in me a need for education from a very early age. I grew up a very curious child, and they fed my hunger for knowledge. Without doubt, I also need to thank Carol and John Uszkalo, not only for their daughter, but for all their efforts in helping my work. Carol and John have helped support us when we were just too tired to feed ourselves, and have continually encouraged us in our work.

Finally, I must acknowledge and thank my partner, Dr. Kirsten C. Uszkalo. Her hard work and dedication to her craft are a constant inspiration to me, and it was through her success that I was encouraged to start down the path of graduate work. Kirsten was very patient in the creation of this work, and was invaluable in her constant encouragement. When I felt my step shake, she became the ground beneath my feet; when I feared the dark, she became the stars.

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The effect of adding a zero: the blog and identity

This study looks at the blog as a medium for exploring identity. However, rather than looking at the blogger's identity as a writer, it will contextualize the blogger within a context where a separate, electronic identity is built for her, by her, and around her. To provide a useful perspective on the blogging process and its effect on identity, I will frame this work using Charles and Ray Eames' 1977 film, *Powers of 10*. The film starts with a 1 meter square, first zooming out by multiples of 10 every 10 seconds. As the image pulls out, more is revealed, until finally we reach 100,000,000 light years and start our journey inwards to the level of the proton. The identity of the blogger is the same; to get a full understanding of how identity works within the blog one needs to take a journey through the blogger's experience in the same way as the Eames' film, zooming in and out, contextualizing not only the blogger within the blogosphere, but the software within the blog as well; it's the effect of adding a zero, even within what seems like a simple universe. What is compelling about *Powers of 10* is how similar both ends of the spectrum are; they might very well be connected, creating a loop. At each level, a new understanding of how connected things are is reached: the protons within the molecule, the molecule within the chromosome, the tissue within the man, the man within the city, and so on. At the surface, 10^1, the blogger is simply writing a genre, be it a personal journal, a linkblog, or a political commentary. We need to explore the different powers

of ten; when we pull out, we see the blogger situated within layers of community: the comments on her own site, the communities she joins, and the blogosphere itself. Each of these has an influence, but it is not until one pulls back that one starts seeing them. Likewise, when we start moving inwards from the blogger, we see new levels of influence: the interface, the blog software itself, and finally the data structures imposed by the database software and physical storage. These too influence the identity of the blogger, for it is by these data structures, programming decisions, and interface designs that her journey in the blog is guided. Yet, if one does not look at each of these levels, one does not see the influence they exert. In this thesis, I look at the blog from near and far in an attempt to better understand its mechanisms and how it affects the identity of the blogger. Using the metaphor of *Powers of 10* as way of looking at the blog and identity, I will start by zooming into the infrastructure of the blog, then zooming out some theoretical considerations of how the act of blogging constructs the blogger's identity, the finally to a view of the role community and blogosphere as a whole.

A brief history of blog

As meteoric as the growth of the blog has been since 2000, it did not emerge from nothingness. The first web pages appeared in 1993, when the World Wide Web was introduced by Tim Berners-Lee.[1] Though the first web server provided abstracts of physics papers (Ward), it was quickly co-opted for business and personal use. Early

[1] One *could* in fact go back to 1991 to find the origin of autobiography on the Internet, with the introduction of the .plan file. Mike Caprio's .plan file dates back to October 14, 1993, containing blog-like entries: "The cursor is blinking impatiently at me, waiting for my input, pulsing furiously even as I type the words that magically appear on my screen. What should I do now?"

adopters of the web created fertile ground for blogging to grow by publishing personal journals and commentaries to their websites. San Francisco web designer Lance Arthur was writing stories of his life online in 1996 on his site, glassdog.com[2] and Derek Powazek was posting personal material as early as 1995 at powazek.com.[3] Sites like these, the forerunners to the blog, were categorized by Yahoo as "Personal Home Pages" (and by 1998 had over 68,000 entries).[4] It is important to note there was a fairly high barrier to entry in these early days of the web, however. In order to maintain a personal website, one had to learn HTML, have access to a WWW server, and know how to transfer files to that server. In addition, one would either have to have the funds to register a domain name – still fairly expensive in the mid-90s – or know someone whose domain name they could place their web pages on. It was not until the introduction of services like Blogger and LiveJournal in the late 1990s that this technical barrier was reduced.

In 1997 Pitas and Diaryland became the first services to allow hosting of weblogs and online journals without requiring the blogger to register a domain, install software, or learn HTML in order to post their entries. They offered a simple-to-use interface which gave users the ability to write their entries on the site (instead of writing content on their own computers and uploading it) and created subdomains for their users, as opposed to a complicated series of subdirectories, such as that offered by free site

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[2] http://www.lancearthur.com/archives/001600.html
[3] http://powazek.com/home/old/words/
[4] http://web.archive.org/web/19981206181543/http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/People/Personal_Home_Pages/

hosting organizations such as Geocities.[5] The two sites offered slightly different services, however: Pitas focused on updating "news" pages or lists of links while Diaryland was much more focused towards the online diary.

Moveable Type and Wordpress are two of the most commonly self-hosted programs, downloaded by the user and kept on a server. Although primarily intended for online journaling and blogging, these content management systems offer more functionality – Moveable Type allowed self design and comments far before Blogger did, allowing greater engagement with community. However many bloggers also use developer hosted services. These user friendly services mean little set up time, but also less flexibility in terms of display. LiveJournal, Blogspot, and Typepad are among the most popular and stable hosted programs and generally the host's name is included in the blog's URL. The Blogger software is a bit of an anomaly, it is more akin use wise to Moveable Type and Wordpress, but it is not self-hosted. These distinctions are important because the developer hosted software removes a barrier to access – users need no technical knowledge beyond access to the internet and basic navigational skills. The advent of this kind of accessibility made the possibility of blogging a reality for users for whom self-hosted options were simply outside their skill set. The medium became a possibility.

Criticism on blogging emerged as early as 1998, when Yasuyuki Kawaura, Yoshiro Kawakami and Kiyomi Yamashita discussed the phenomenon in their article

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[5] For example, http://dave2002.pitas.com/ as opposed to http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Lakes/9999/vms.html.

"Keeping a Diary in Cyberspace." Kawaura *et al* concluded that online journals were "primarily a communicative behavior" and that they were a form of self-expression and self-disclosure (244, 236). In 2000, Phillip Lejeune wrote *Cher Écran* and Rebecca Blood published "Weblogs: A history and perspective," which gives an excellent, if brief, chronology of the development of the weblog. She starts with Jorn Barger's *Robot Wisdom*, which claims the first usage of the term in 1997 and skims past some of the early names in blogging on her way to discussing the rise of Pitas, one of the first blogging services, Blogger, and Dave Winer's *Edit this Page*. There has been much critical and cultural focus on the blog since its rise in 1999, in an attempt to categorize and examine. Blogs have been looked at as online diaries, online journals, new journalism, and "Hyde Park corner blather" (Dvorak, 2002). The majority of scholars have chosen to look at the blog as an online extension or even evolution of the autobiographical diary form or conducted other such genre-targeted studies. Jill Walker has been paying critical attention to weblogs as part of her larger research on distributed narratives; she keeps a blog of her research at http://www.jilltxt.net/, and is publishing a book on blogging in 2008. A special edition of *Biography* was published in 2003 on the online journal. Viviane Serfaty published her book on American weblogs, *The Mirror and the Veil: An Overview of American Online Diaries and Blogs* (2004) and their social functions. More recently, danah boyd has included the blog as part of her greater study of social media. Critics such as Philippe Lejeune, Julie Rak, and Viviane Serfaty, have looked at the content of the blog, and its genre forms. Although this is an exciting and useful approach, I'd like to propose expanding the focus to consider the link between the

infrastructure, the mechanisms and the informational structure behind the blog itself, and the creation of meaning.

Methodology

In the introduction to Gerard Genette's text, Richard Macksey argues that paratexts are "the liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that mediate the book to the reader" as well as the "framing elements" of the text which help create meaning for the reader (xviii). The blog's content is important, but it is only a small part of the analytic problem when looking at the larger issue of identity. The software, the blogger, and her community are interrelated components which create and mediate the blogger's identity for both blogger and blogosphere. Whereas Genette uses the concept of paratext as something "enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers" (1), this study looks at the software, the blogger and her community as three paratextual elements of the blog that can serve as a method for unfolding the mechanisms of identity within.

In her article "A Blogger's Blog: Exploring the Definition of a Medium," danah boyd "invites scholars to conceptualize blogging as a diverse set of practices that result in the production of diverse content on top of a medium that we call blogs" (1). She goes on to argue that

> by conceptualizing the blog as a medium instead of a genre, it is possible to see how blogs are more akin to paper than to diaries. It is not the conventions or content-types that define blogs, but the framework in which people can express

themselves. Using paper, people document their lives. The same is true in blogs. Using paper, people take notes. The same is true in blogs. Paper and blogs are used for everything from creating grocery lists to publishing innovative research, drawing pictures to advertising furniture for sale, tracking personal bills to writing gossip columns. Mediums are flexible, allowing all different sorts of expressions and constantly evolving.

Although this analogy allows us to see blogs as flexible conduits for the creation of identity, when looking at blogs as paper, as platforms, we are also aware of how that paper is configured. We use different papers in different ways; lined paper invites us to compose writing, sketch paper suggests a more unstructured use of the space, and a ledger implies the recording of business data. One can think of the relationship of the blog and the software the runs it in the same terms as paper and the diary. The average user would not spend time thinking of the elements of interface within the blog software they are using, but it greatly determines the way in which they will blog. As the ledger implies financial data, so does the interface that provides fields to record your current mood, reading, and listening alongside categories and topic fields. Likewise, the community in which the blogger situates herself will also have an important effect on how her identity develops. Evan Williams knew when he started Blogger that the form and format were more important than the content (Blood (2004) 54); Marshall McLuhan's famous and overused quote did not say the genre was the message, and it is time that we as researchers take that into account.

Arguing for the creation of identity through medium is not without its dangers: identity is a very subjective, full, and locative term. Identity has different critical meanings to different disciplines: philosophers mark "identity" as that which simply differentiates one item from another; in terms of an individual's identity, they prefer to use the term "personal identity" – a particularly troublesome term, fraught with questions (Olson *Stanford Encyclopedia of Psychology*);[6] psychology breaks identity into self-identity, social identity, cultural identity, and gender identity. When I refer to a blogger's identity in this work, I talk primarily of her *online* identity. As I will discuss in chapter two, the blogger's identity conflates presence and absence, representing the blogger even when she is not physically present at her blog. Yet, "identity" is the right term; bloggers frequently self-identify with their blogs; boyd argues it is "the facet of them that is captured through the practice of blogging" ("A Bloggers Blog" 11).

Like the picnicker in *Powers of* 10, there is a universe which surrounds the blog, and particles of information that it consists of. A rich study of the blog, especially in terms of the production of identity, must travel through all the levels in order to fully understand the mechanisms at work. I will use several different methodological approaches throughout this work to untangle the influence the blog's paratextual elements have on the blogger's identity. In chapter one, I offer an in-depth look at what happens beyond the sight of the blogger at the microscopic level; the simple choice of software is not simple at all and in fact has a great influence on the shape a blogger's

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[6] Olson writes that the te[illegible] a single problem but rather a wide range of loosely connected questions" of personhood, persist[illegible] evidence, and population.

identity will take through the interface, program design, and data structures imposed on her by the software. This primarily technical discussion will illuminate the inner workings of the medium and gives due credence to Marshall McLuhan's argument that "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (8). In chapter two, I look at how the blogger works to define her own identity. For this, I take a more theory-based approach, using a layered implementation of Jacques Lacan, Alfred North Whitehead, and N. Katherine Hayles. A process not dissimilar from Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory of identity formation is encountered by the blogger as she blogs; however, unlike the Lacanian subject, her identity is in a constant state of construction and deconstruction, flickering between the ideal and social "I" reflected back at them. Lacanian identity is troubled by the posthuman body, which lacks presence/absence, and it is unable to resolve its identity. Finally, I travel 100,000,000 light years to look at how the blog and the blogger operate within the larger context of their community. The first stop in this journey is the community around a single blog; I look to Ze Frank's *The Show* and Heather Armstrong's *Dooce* to investigate how community works with the blogger to produce identity. Next, I look at the community a blogger joins outside her own blog. For this I look to *Blog Her*, a coalition of women bloggers. Finally, I look at the community journal site LiveJournal, investigating the role of the confessory impulse in the production of the blogger's identity. The Eames started their journey by zooming out into the universe; let's instead start by looking inward.

Chapter One: Normalizing Identity, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Code.

I begin in the same position as *Powers of 10*, starting with the infrastructure that is visible to the naked eye: the interface. The blog's interface is akin to the hand in Charles and Ray Eames' short; it is the way the blogger engages with the world. This is where we begin our look at blogging. It is important to look at interface, as it is central to the development of the individual blogger's identity, providing the affordance to follow a given mode of writing, whether autobiographical, documentary, or fictional. However, although it is an central part of researching the blog and identity, interface cannot be discussed without first dissecting the software and data structures involved in its creation. We then move inside the machine – the blog software and the decisions made there. The infrastructure behind the interface, although never directly seen by the blogger, is just as important as the interface – it drives the interface's development and defines its boundaries – and enables a web page form to become a blog and be offered as such to its readers. The infrastructure is a central element; without it the interface has no purpose and the blog cannot be created nor displayed to the reader. Finally, we arrive at the proton, or for the sake of the blog, the raw data itself. Here we encounter pure information and reach the limits of what we can see: it is crucial to the construction of the blog but too abstract to read.

Technology plays such an integral part in distinguishing the blog as a new medium, apart from that of written (paper-based) text; as a result, a study of the blog that does not investigate its infrastructure is incomplete. As much as a Joyce researcher must understand the medium of the books the researcher exploring blogging must understand the media of the blog. Critics of blogging scholarship point out the lack of technical discussion around the software used by bloggers as a weakness (Scheidt 2005, Lawley 2004). The criticism is valid; critics' attention has been focused on the output of the blogs, categorizing them as an extension of existing genres, whether that be of the diary (Rak 167) or the newspaper (Koman). This chapter serves as a response to the criticism, and aims to start the discussion by looking into the dark recesses of the software, databases, and code to illustrate just how influential infrastructure is in defining identity.

It's normal(ized)

Programmers do not care about the content of any given blog. The people who develop Movable Type, Blogger, LiveJournal, and Wordpress *are* developing software which helps making blogging a much simpler process, and they do listen to customer requests for features. But the developer is not concerned whether your blog will be an online journal, a political commentary, or a collection of cat pictures – what she is concerned about is memory allocation, disk usage, and transaction speed. Every shortcut taken in the source code, every data type or archiving scheme not supported, every function written, and every decision made by the programmer to achieve these

goals has an influence on the interface, and therefore on the content the blogger produces. Despite working at an indifferent distance, the developer heavily influences the blog – and by extension, blogger's identity – by the decisions she makes when she codes the software.

The way we structure language helps create meaning; likewise, the way in which it is stored also has meaning. To the programmer, language is nothing more than a set of bits and data types, which must be sorted into different containers. How the programmer deals with data affects how she creates the interface; if she has no data structure in place to handle a certain kind of information, she cannot request it from the user in the interface. The data structure is created through a process called normalization – breaking data down into its smallest logical parts. Developers normalize data in order to make it easier to use and reuse in a database: the title of your blog entry goes in one container; the body text goes into another, and so on. The structure of the data does not necessarily match the structure of its original context, however. Although a title and the body text are related to the same entry, no consideration is given by the developer as to whether one comes before the other, whether it should be displayed in a specific style, or if one has hierarchical importance over the other in the page. The data structure is dictated by the individual pieces of data themselves. If we look at a typical blog entry, it is quickly apparent how the data might be structured:

- Title (string)
- Date (datetime)
- Entry Text (text)
- Category (integer)
- Extended Text (text)
- Post Status (integer)
- Keywords (integer)

The developer takes the data within each of these containers and stores it within a database. This may be a simple database, such as a CSV[7] or Berkeley DB[8] file, or it may reside within a more complex relational database such as MySQL or Microsoft SQL Server. Within the database exists a series of tables, and within each table resides a series of fields. A table holds a single record of data – a blog entry – and the table's fields hold properties of that data, such as the title or entry date. *Figure 1* illustrates an example of the above; a developer has created an *Entries* table with the fields *EntryID*[9], *Title, Date, BodyText, ExtendedText, Keywords, Category,* and *Post Status.*

---

[7] Comma-Separated Values. Each record of data consists of a single, unbroken line within a text file, which contains a series of values – each separated by a comma or other delimiter. An example of a CSV file for our entry would look like the following:

EntryID,Title,Date,BodyText,ExtendedText,Keywords,Category,PostStatus
1,My Entry,12/15/2006,This is the entry,,personal,Personal,Published
2,My Other Entry,12/20/2006,Look – another entry,And some extended text,personal,Personal,Published

[8] Berkeley DB is a file-based database structure, which offers some basic relational mechanisms, but is not as robust or performant as other database systems.

[9] For compatibility with multiple database systems, spaces are generally discouraged in both table and field names.

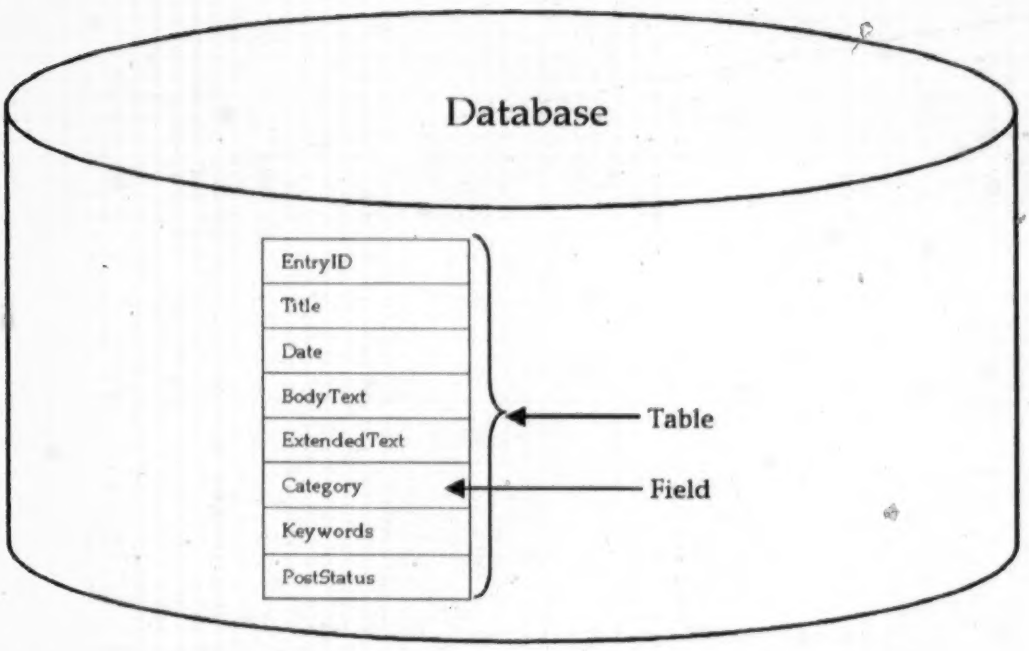

Figure 1: Database Schematic displaying the relationship of fields and tables. A table holds records of data within the database, while fields describe the properties of each record.

When it is possible, such as with the *Category* and *Post Status* fields, the developer will actually replace a string (alphanumeric) value with a numeric pointer to the same data within another table in the database. For example, an author may create a set of categories for her blog (such as "Personal Life," "School," et cetera, which are stored in a separate database table named *Categories* and associated with a unique ID (*CategoryID*). When an entry is marked with the *Personal* category, the software queries the database to see what the *CategoryID* of the *Personal* category is in the *Categories* table, and places that in the *Category* field in an entry's record in the *Entries* table (see Figure 2). This sets up a series of relations within a database, and helps keep the database smaller; an integer takes far less space in the database than a string: 1 byte to store a single-digit

integer, compared to 8 bytes for the string "Personal"; when you start working with hundreds of entries, this difference adds up quickly. It is also easier to maintain; if you want to rename the "Personal" category to "Stories from the woeful events of my unexaggerated life" for example, you would only have to update the entry once in the *Categories* table; because it is referenced by its *CategoryID* in each entry, it will automatically be updated in all records that reference it. *Figure 2* illustrates the above relationship between the *Category* field in the *Entries* table, and the *CategoryID* field in the *Categories* table, while *Figure 3* shows how data falls into the structure.

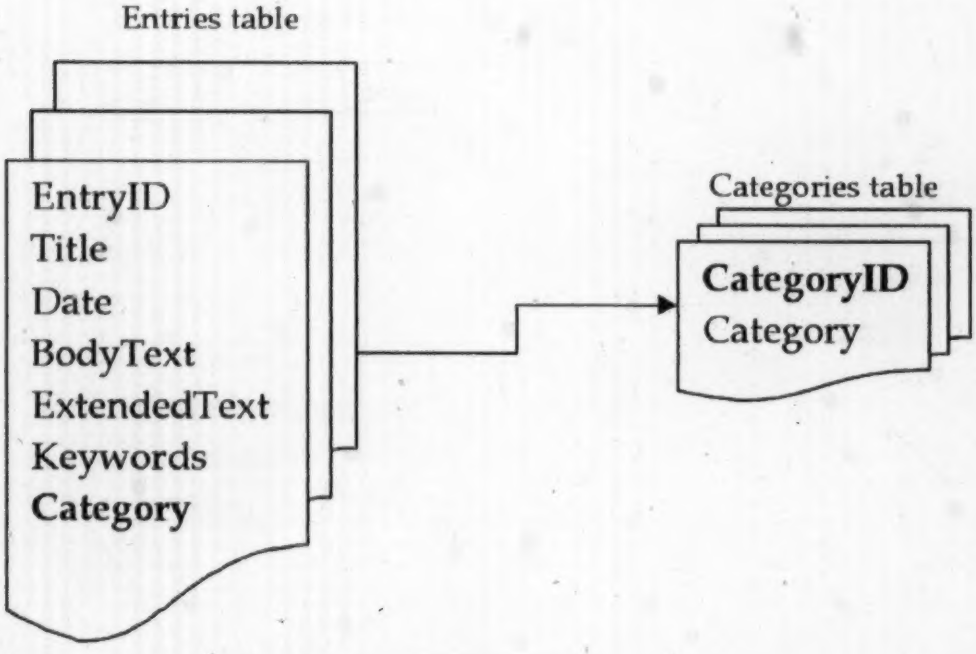

Figure 2. Relation between database tables based on an integer ID. The Category field in the Entries table creates a pointer to the CategoryID field in the Categories table. This allows for easy reuse of data within the database without duplication.

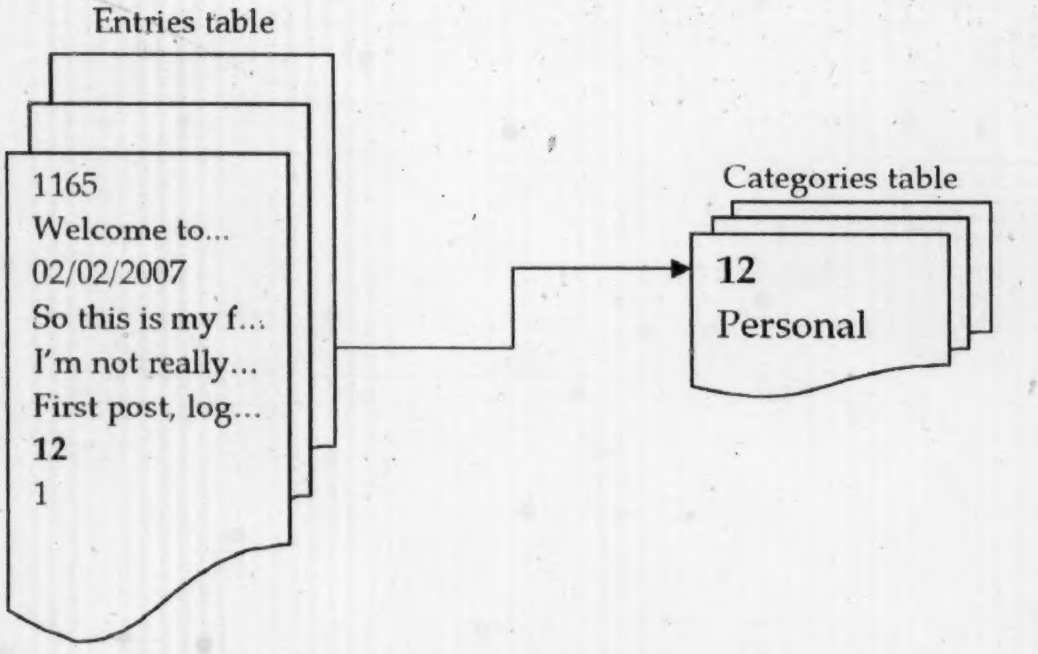

Figure 3: Example of *Figure* 2 with data to illustrate the relationship between tables. The value '12' in the Entries table provides a pointer to the category "Personal"

By abstracting often-used data such as a category into separate database tables, data can be reused within the database, which in turn keeps the size of the database smaller. If we know we will be referring to a single category in multiple entries, it makes sense to create a table of possible categories and then point to their unique identifier within each individual entry.

Each field within a database table is configured to accept a specific format of information known as a data type. For example, the *Date* field in the *Entries* table above would be given a data type of DATETIME,[10] while the *Category* field would be given a data type of INT (to specify an integer value). The body text of an entry would be

[10] For the purposes of this section, I will use MySQL Data types. Data types may vary slightly between different database applications.

placed in a binary data type known as the BLOB, since this is a type of data whose size is variable from record to record. Normalization conditions data to its purpose, and ensures that the developer always knows what kind of data to expect when he or she retrieves it later. It also has the benefit of loosely validating the data by rejecting invalid data types. If an attempt to store a piece of INT data in the *Date* field is made, it will trigger an error, which prevents the data from being misused within an application.

The decisions made by the developer at this point, which involve configuring the tables and fields within the database, ultimately determine what will appear in the blog's interface. If tables and fields do not exist in the database to support categorization of an entry, for example, it is unlikely to appear in the interface since there is no facility to store the information (and by extension, not prompt the blogger to categorize her thoughts). As I will discuss later in this chapter, the interface leads the blogger into a mode of writing through the affordances it provides.

One of these things is not like the others

Different blog software packages produce different kinds of blogs, since many software packages are written for specific uses (for example, compare LiveJournal's emphasis on community journaling as opposed to Blogger's initial focus on the more generic activity of updating a website). The differences in their infrastructure – and therefore also in their interfaces – set one blogging package apart from another. Although the blogger might not be aware of the universe of code behind the screen, the way different blogging packages are coded and the interfaces they provide delineate the

ways in which a blogger can shape his or her identity: the tools influence the end product, which is the blog itself. A software package created for diary writing, like DiaryLand, will reinforce the type of introspection that style of writing affords. If a software package is for a more general audience, like Movable Type, the blogger is given more latitude in her composition and identity may be formed around an external focus, such as politics.

The interface gives the blogger certain affordances, something Robert St. Amant defines as "an ecological property of the relationship between an agent and the environment" (135).[11] Amant describes affordance as a function we can see that is intuitive: "we can often tell how to interact with an object or environmental feature simply by looking at it, with little or no thought involved" (135, 136) – for example, we instinctively know not only what a chair is for, but the best way to make use of it. St. Amant further breaks down the affordance into four separate affordance-related concepts: relationship, action, perception, and mental construct (136-7). He goes on to discuss how to incorporate the idea of affordance into developing a user interface, focusing on action and relationship. The last of these concepts, affordance as a mental construct, is most relevant to our discussion. St. Amant writes "these mental affordances are the internal encodings of symbols denoting relationships, rather than the external situations that evoke the symbols" (137). In the authoring of the blog, the affordance of developing identity cannot be pinned on a single HTML control or text

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[11] St. Amant derives his definition of affordance from James J Gibson. Whereas Gibson relegates the affordance to *environment*, St. Amant extends it to suit discussions of interface in the non-physical world.

box; it is the process as a whole. LiveJournal and DiaryLand, for example, have the affordance of keeping a personal journal, or online diary. Blogger has the affordance of developing identity in a broader way by not necessarily focusing it on an autobiographical activity.[12]

Three blogging applications

A study of all available blogging packages and services is beyond the scope of a project this size: there are well over one million hits in Google alone for "blog software," innumerable hosted services such as MySpace, Xanga, and DiaryLand, and countless comparison charts of self-installed packages such as Movable Type.[13] In this section, I will look at three of the most popular packages – Blogger, Movable Type, and LiveJournal – focusing primarily on their differences to illustrate how the choice of software – and the development cycle behind it – can radically change a blogger's output, and hence the way they self-identify.

Blogger

Blogger, launched in August 1999 by Ev Williams and Meg Hourihan at Pyra Labs, is certainly credited for the early growth of the blog medium.[14] It was originally created as a simple tool to help the developers to update their own websites, but they quickly recognized the potential appeal and retooled it for public use. Initially,

[12] It should also be said that the discussion of affordances, interface, and their effect on identity does not stop with the blog. Many of the ideas brought up in this chapter can also be applied to social networking tools such as Flickr and Facebook, and more traditional Internet tools such as IRC.

[13] Such as the WeblogMatrix.org website, and Asymptomatic.net's blog breakdown (http://asymptomatic.net/blogbreakdown.htm)

[14] Rebecca Blood credits Blogger for the second wave of blogging's growth, crediting Pitas with the first initial growth. However, she also gives Blogger credit for bringing Blogger into the mainstream.

Blogger's interface was very simple. It was just a text box, a list of the most recent entries, and a calendar to look up entries from a specific date. Even today, Blogger does not tie the blogger to any specific kind of format, nor does it organize anything for the blogger. Like the page of a diary, the interface offers only a sequential means of finding and manoeuvering through information.

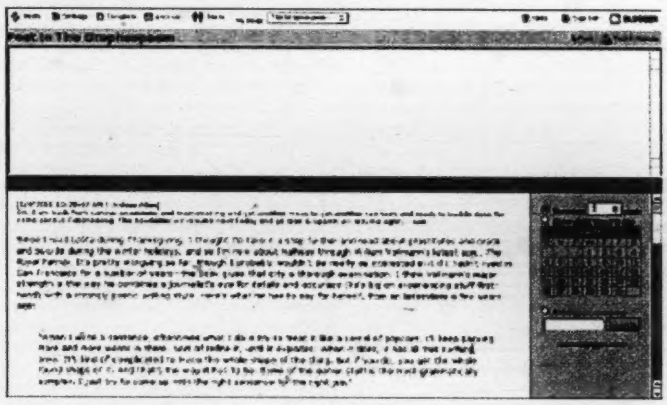

Figure 4: Blogger Interface, circa 2002. Note the minimal interface, with only a text field and a calendar for browsing older entries.
Source:http://www.webmonkey.com/webmonkey/02/18/stuff/blogger.gif

The original Blogger UI was a blank slate for identity production. It didn't provide much in the way of functionality: no titles or archive categories were available, for instance. This was primarily due to the initial focus on updating the content of a website and keeping a chronological-style archive featured by Blogger. For their purposes, nothing more was needed for the interface. Despite some cosmetic changes and their purchase by Google, the core functionality of Blogger has not significantly changed since its initial creation. Blogger became far more style- and brand-conscious, placing more emphasis on branding the interface with the Blogger logo and creating a more visually appealing interface. Blogger has added post labels that can be used to

categorize a post, a rich-text editor that removes the need for any HTML knowledge, and comment functionality missing from early versions of the software, but it has not significantly changed beyond these. The canvas is still quite blank for the author, and she still has the ability to shape her blog however she sees fit.

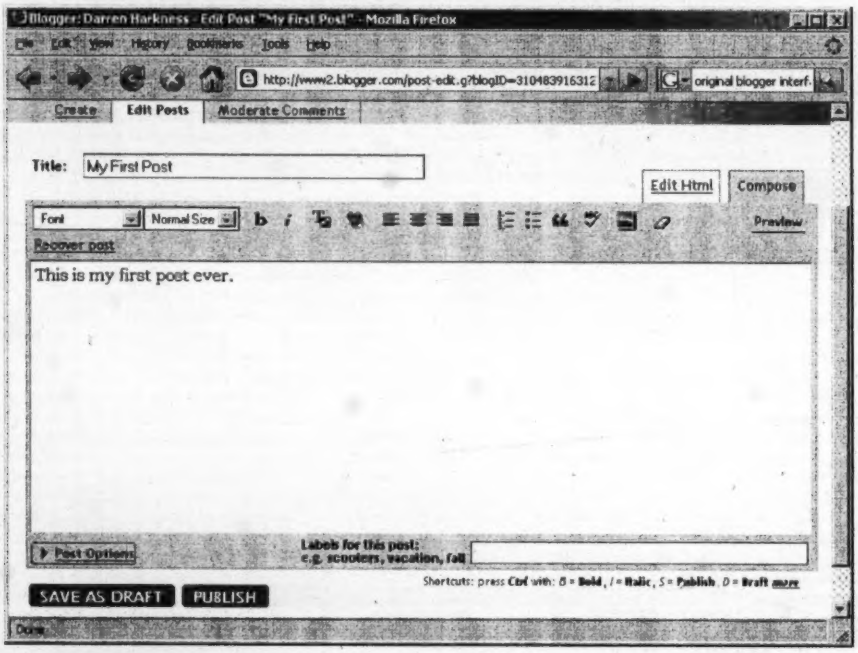

Figure 5: New Blogger Interface, December 2006. Note the addition of a title field, a rich-text editor, and post labels.

Unlike installed blog software, bloggers are not given direct access to Blogger's database structure or code. But much is said about both through their Application Programming Interface (API), which is available for other programmers to write software to interface with Blogger.[15] An example of adding a new entry through the API

[15] An API is way for outside developers to access portions of a software's data structure, without giving them access to the source code. This allows third parties to develop additional functionality for the software, or products that work with the software. The Blogger API is available at http://code.blogger.com/archives/atom-docs.html#create-post

is shown below, showing only three pieces of entry-related data: the title for the entry, the date of publication, and the entry's content.

```
POST /atom/3187374 HTTP/1.1
Content-type: application/xml
Host: www.blogger.com
Authorization: BASIC c3RldmVqOm5vdGFyZWFscGFzc3dvcmQ=

<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" standalone="yes"?>
<entry xmlns="http://purl.org/atom/ns#">
  <title mode="escaped" type="text/plain">atom test</title>
  <issued>2004-04-12T06:07:20Z</issued>
  <generator url="http://www.yoursitesurlhere.com">Your client's name
here.</generator>
  <content type="application/xhtml+xml">
    <div xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">Testing the Atom API</div>
  </content>
</entry>
```

The lack of complexity in Blogger's data structure has to do with both its environment and its user base. Blogger supports millions of active blogs and must be conscious of its resources as a result, especially since they do not charge for the service. Any functionality added to the system, therefore, must have as little impact as possible on the servers. This was first noticed by Evan Williams in 2001, when the popularity of Blogger caused the server for it to go down repeatedly; he eventually started a fundraising effort to purchase a new server to handle the additional load.[16] Further enhancements were made to the core Blogger system to improve performance from 2001 to 2004. It was not until 2004, after its purchase by Google, that Blogger received attention to the front-end interface.

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[16] http://web.archive.org/web/20010202135500/http://www.blogger.com/server_fund.pyra

Blogger is focused on the non-technical Internet user; although its users can customize their blogs' appearance and insert HTML into an entry, they are by no means required to do this in order to publish their blog. Madeleine Sorapure writes that the online diary "foregrounds the fact that the writer lives and writes in a context highly mediated by technology" (4), and this is apparent in Blogger. However, it is not just the writing that is mediated by Blogger and other blogging software; identity is just as mediated. Blogger, like the other blogging packages, offers an affordance to its users: it becomes immediately clear that you are writing something which also has a title and a date. Blogger's interface – in contrast to LiveJournal, which I will discuss later in this chapter – provides only a very basic affordance, and as a result has a minimal influence on what the blogger writes. She may be writing a diary entry, minutes of the latest council meeting, or a shopping list. Beyond that, how the blogger mediates the content (but not always the presentation) of her own writing – and by extension her own identity – is left entirely up to her.

Movable Type

Blogger experienced a large amount of growth from 1999 to 2001, due to its ease of use and central nature.[17] It quickly started showing its limitations, however, in its lack of more advanced functionality such as comments and categorization of entries. In addition, some of its potential users were wary of entrusting their content to a company's servers. There were some attempts to create site-installed blog management

[17] Blogger did not require its users to learn HTML, or scripting, or any other part of publishing to the web. Blogger only asked for a username and password to upload files to a blogger's website. This ease of publication made it much more attractive for people to put material on the web.

software packages during this time, such as Noah Grey's GreyMatter, but it was not until Movable Type's introduction in late 2001 that the site-installed blog software gained traction. Ben and Mena Trott created Movable Type because they wanted a self-managed blog management tool for their own projects. It quickly gained interest among bloggers who wanted more from their blog software than Blogger was offering, or who felt uncomfortable trusting their content and privacy to a third-party host. In 2002, after Movable Type became popular, they formed the company Six Apart to manage the development of Movable Type ("Six Apart History"). They offered features such as the capacity for host multiple blogs and authors, categorization of entries, a built-in commenting system, the ability to draft entries, and multiple output formats (Blogger only offered HTML, while Movable Type offered HTML and RSS) (Movable Type "About" (archive)).

Movable Type is installed by the user (or her administrator) on the blogger's web server; as a result, it does not suffer from the same infrastructure and resource concerns that Blogger does. Movable Type is developed for a small user base in each installation – generally a single blogger, but realistically no more than a handful of them.[18] In 2001, this meant that Movable Type could have functionality which Blogger could not, without worrying about how it would scale up to tens or hundreds of thousands of users.

[18] Six Apart sells up to 10 licenses for their blogging software. If a customer needs to support more than 10 bloggers, they must contact Six Apart for special pricing.

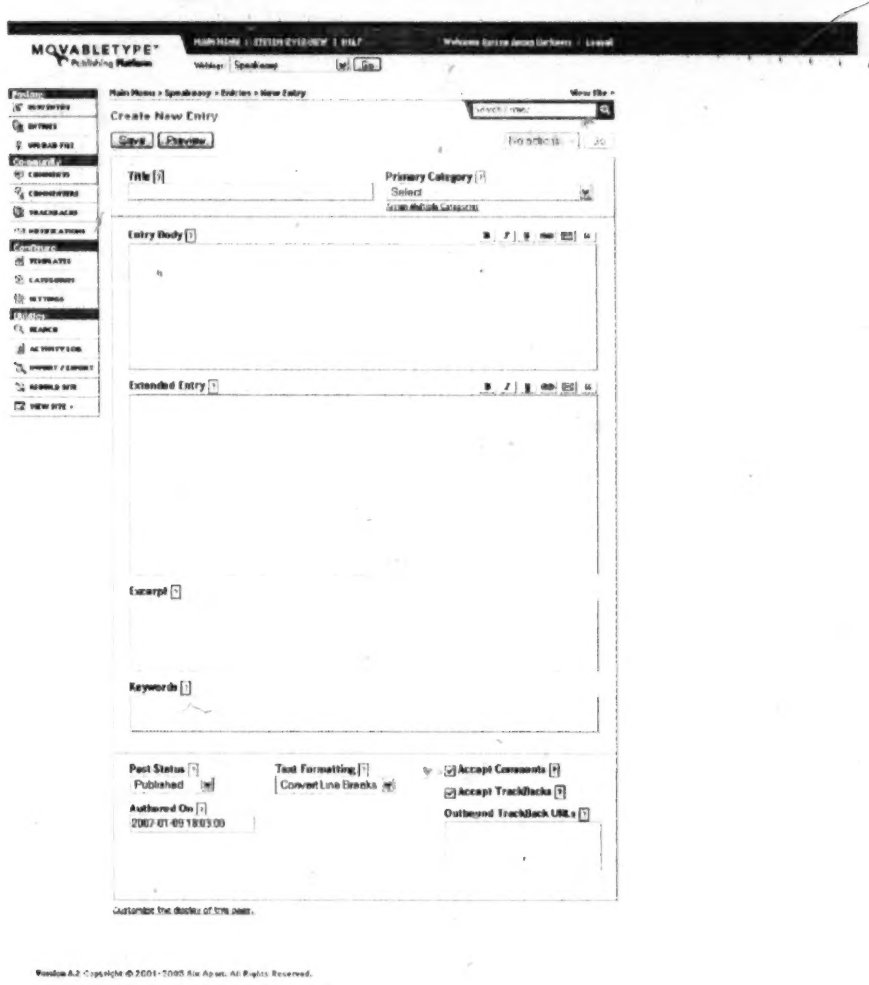

Figure 6: Movable Type Entry Screen showing post options such as categories, keywords, post status, comment options

The freedom that Ben and Mena Trott gained by writing a server-side application allowed them to better define how they wanted to blog. The decisions they made were to support the features they wanted to see in their own blogs, such as commenting and the ability to have more than one author (important for collaborative blogs, or for a website that contains more than one blog). As a result, they created a more complicated data structure to support this, as can be seen in *Appendix I*. Because the database is

hosted on the same server as the blog (or small collection of blogs), efficiency and database size are not as big a concern for Moveable Type as they are for centrally-hosted blogging tools such as Blogger. This allowed Ben and Mena Trott to create a more complex database structure that allowed for more data to be stored with an entry. Instead of Blogger's *tabula rasa* text box , more direction was given to the blogger in the development of his or her online identity. The new entry screen for Movable type can be seen in Figure 6 The blogger can do the following: specify a Title, a Primary Category and additional secondary categories; split her entries into Entry Body and Extended Entry fields, which will remove a portion of the full blog post from the front page; summarize the post in an Excerpt; add Keywords; decide whether or not the post should be published or kept as a draft, and finally she can even decide what day it should be Authored on, whether that day is in the future or the past. This level of control over the process of blogging is of critical importance in the study of identity. In the example of Blogger, the individual is really left to her own devices in the development of her own identity. Only a simple text box guides her way. But in Movable Type, the blogger is given some tools. First, she is able to categorize her writing, which forces her to reflect on what it is she is going to write (or has written). Once that task is complete, and her entry is written, she can summarize her thoughts in the Summary field, reflecting on them again. In order that she can more easily recall her writing at a later date, she adds tags and keywords[19] describing the content to the entry, and categorizes the entry within her own taxonomy. Finally she consciously publishes it

[19] Six Apart describes the subtle difference between keywords and tags here: http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/beta/2006/06/everybody_loves_tags.html

by first previewing, seeing it as her readers do, then saving the entry. At every step in Movable Type, the blogger is forced to re-examine what she has written and perhaps even re-examine who she herself is supposed to be. This is common to the other tools described in this chapter, and I will go into more depth in the next chapter as to how this helps to shape the blogger's identity. Movable Type offers the same wide potential for development of identity as Blogger, but adds affordance for greater self-reflection. By focusing more attention to the publishing process, Movable Type helps the blogger be at once the observer and the observed. She can see herself seeing, as her audience does, and shape her identity accordingly.

LiveJournal

LiveJournal was launched at around the same time as Blogger, but it offered a much more delineated experience for its users. Brad Fitzpatrick, LiveJournal's creator, developed LiveJournal as a community-based diary site; bloggers can create and update their own diaries, but they can also connect with others' diaries based on geographic area, group interests, or by including other LiveJournal users as friends ("What is LiveJournal?").[20] LiveJournal has very similar infrastructures issues to Blogger: the system must support thousands of bloggers at any given moment (at the time of writing, LiveJournal's statistics[21] showed 160,251 updates over the last 24-hour period). As a result, its data structure must also be relatively simple. This is reflected in the new journal entry page in LiveJournal, seen in *Figure 7*. It is not

[20] I describe this process in more detail in Chapter Three when discussing the role of community in LiveJournal.

[21] http://www.livejournal.com/stats.bml

significantly different from that of Blogger. Both supply the blogger with a subject and body text field, and list entries by date. It is the differences between the two that change blogger's experience. however. LiveJournal's interface offers a far different affordance than Blogger and Movable Type: the fields it brings forward from the data structure – your mood, your location, a customizable avatar[22] with mood-based keywords, and the music currently playing – all put the blogger in the mindset of creating an entry in a diary-like document.[23] These additional fields provide the affordance of placing more thought on your emotional state when writing a new entry, and reinforce the autobiographical nature of LiveJournal. In addition, LiveJournal subscribers can upload multiple userpics, which can be assigned to entries as a visual indicator of mood. One blogger, Kethryvis, has 21 avatars each with different associated keywords, such as "I need a hug", "studying", and "do not fuck with me."

LiveJournal differentiates itself from Blogger and Movable Type by offering several ways for its bloggers to create entries: a blogger can use their web-based forms, download a software application, send an email to her journal, or even call in an entry over the phone. Each of these ways of creating entries involves a different interface and, in the case of email and the phone, carry different connotations and meanings that problematize the idea of the infrastructure and interface as shapers of

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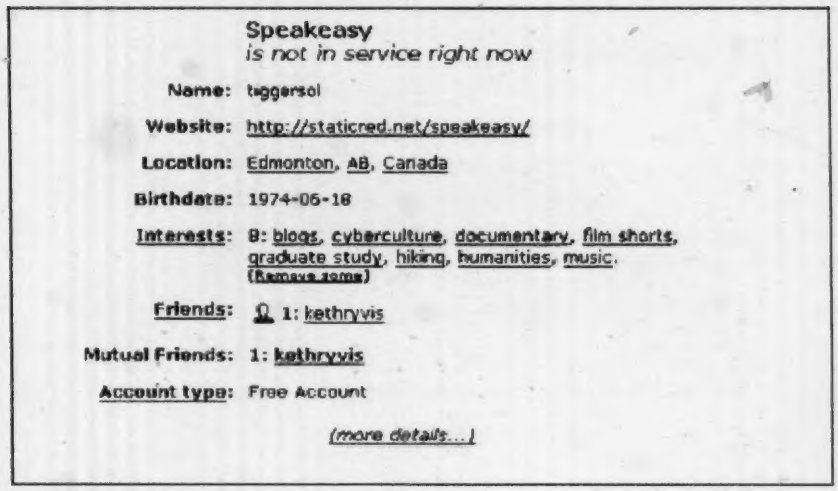
[22] An avatar in LiveJournal is an image that shows up next to each entry. LiveJournal allows its users to specify which avatar is attached to a particular entry.

[23] The additional fields center around the spatial and emotional. Listening to a Simon and Garfunkel song may not spur a LiveJournal user to write a blog entry about the historical evolution of the baby boomer generation through the late 1960s, but it may spur them to write a diary entry about how they used to listen to Simon and Garfunkel with their parents as a child.

identity. What does it mean for a blogger to send an email to her diary or talk to it on the phone? Although LiveJournal decentralizes its interface, all of the interfaces carry with them an overall undertone of Foucault's confessional model, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. Where Blogger and Movable Type are centered on the individual, and reflect the individual back, LiveJournal is built around an anonymous gestalt, the community. In the email and phone interfaces, the LiveJournal blogger communicates directly to this confessor. In the case of the web-based forms, she communicates indirectly. Regardless whether direct or indirect, communication is taking place between the blogger and her confessor. LiveJournal also offers the option to specify how private an entry is; it can be set as public, friends-only, or completely private (which mimics the traditional diary). This is critical, and is something I will discuss in more detail in the final chapter.

LiveJournal does not require highly technical knowledge to create and use its service. Bloggers do not need to secure hosting, register a domain name, or even learn HTML. Likewise, bloggers only need basic web browsing skills to find and add LiveJournal bloggers who share their interests: From the user profile screen, you can click on either your physical location or any of your interests to receive a list of related communities (Figure 9) or users (Figure 10). Once a blogger finds a user with shared interests, she can add them to her friends list by loading their profile (Figure 11) and clicking on the Add ( ) button. The ease with which the blogger using LiveJournal can create a community of fellow diarists helps further position her within the online diary genre.

Figure 7: LiveJournal Entry Screen, showing mood-specific elements such as mood, location, and music as well as comment screening and entry privacy levels.



Speakeasy
is not in service right now

Name: taggersol

Website: http://staticred.net/speakeasy/

Location: Edmonton, AB, Canada

Birthdate: 1974-06-18

Interests: 8: blogs, cyberculture, documentary, film shorts, graduate study, hiking, humanities, music.
(Remove some)

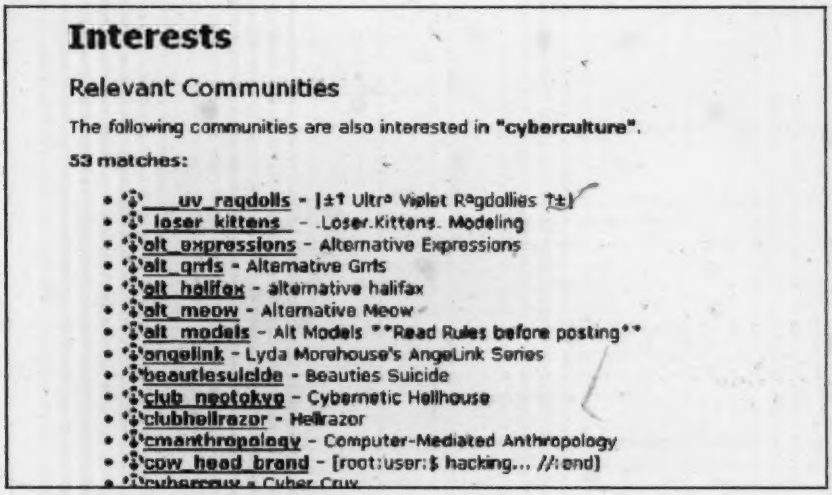
Friends: 1: kethryvis

Mutual Friends: 1: kethryvis

Account type: Free Account

(more details...)

Figure 8: User Profile



Interests

Relevant Communities

The following communities are also interested in **"cyberculture"**.

53 matches:

- uv_ragdolls - |±† Ultra Violet Ragdollies †±|
- loser_kittens - .Loser.Kittens. Modeling
- alt_expressions - Alternative Expressions
- alt_grrls - Alternative Grrls
- alt_halifax - alternative halifax
- alt_meow - Alternative Meow
- alt_models - Alt Models **Read Rules before posting**
- angelink - Lyda Morehouse's AngeLink Series
- beautiesuicide - Beauties Suicide
- club_neotokyo - Cybernetic Hellhouse
- clubhellrazor - Hellrazor
- cmanthropology - Computer-Mediated Anthropology
- cow_head_brand - [root:user:$ hacking... //:end]
- cybercruy - Cyber Cruy

Figure 9: Community groups based on interest

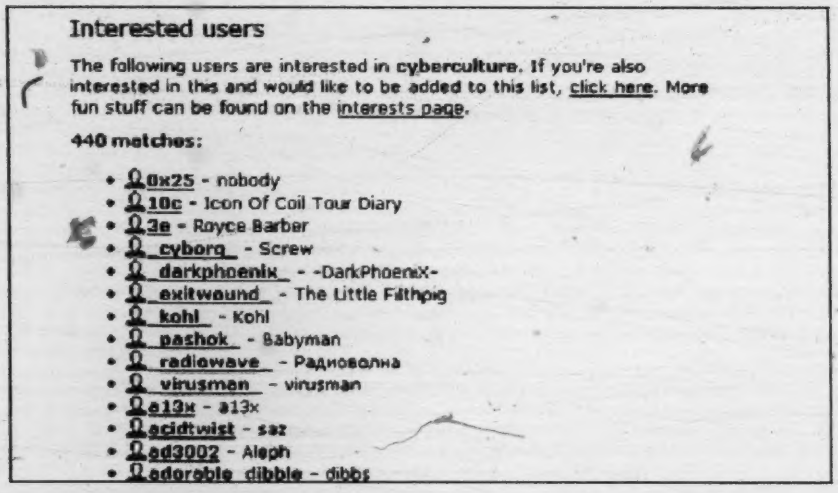

Interested users
The following users are interested in cyberculture. If you're also interested in this and would like to be added to this list, click here. More fun stuff can be found on the interests page.
440 matches:
0x25 - nobody
10c - Icon Of Coil Tour Diary
3e - Royce Barber
cyborg - Screw
darkphoenix - -DarkPhoenix-
exitwound - The Little Filthpig
kohl - Kohl
pashok - Babyman
radiowave - Радиоволна
virusman - virusman
a13x - a13x
acidtwist - saz
ad3002 - Aleph
adorable_dibble - dibbs

Figure 10: Users with common interest

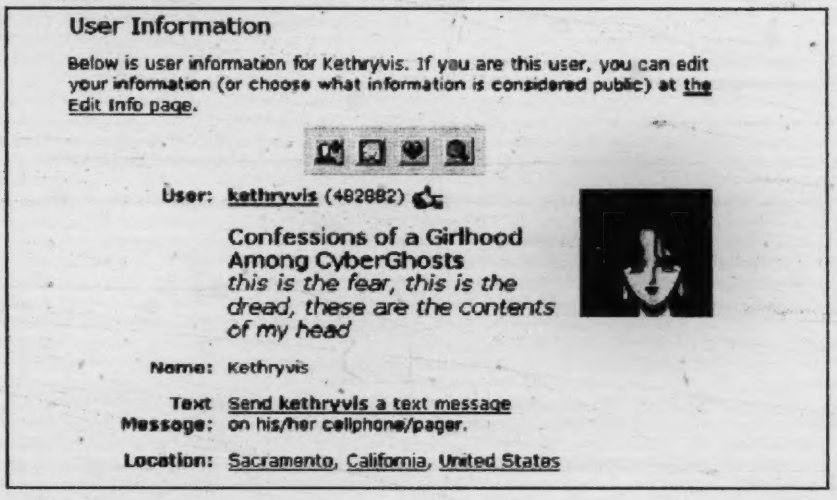

User Information
Below is user information for Kethryvis. If you are this user, you can edit your information (or choose what information is considered public) at the Edit Info page.
User: kethryvis (402882)
Confessions of a Girlhood Among CyberGhosts
this is the fear, this is the dread, these are the contents of my head
Name: Kethryvis
Text Message: Send kethryvis a text message on his/her cellphone/pager.
Location: Sacramento, California, United States

Figure 11: Adding a Friend

The infrastructure of the blog is its most fundamental paratextual element. Like the cells, molecules, and protons in *Powers of 10*, the interface, infrastructure, and data work together to shape the blogger's experience. In the act of selecting software, the blogger not only sets herself into an individual genre of blog – and hence forms an identity based on that genre – but she also sets the terms of the involvement within her

community. In the next chapter, I look at the identity of the blogger in terms of the blogger herself in terms of Lacan's model of identity. The interface and infrastructure of the blog may create a mirror for the blogger to peer into, but it is the blogger that makes the decision to look; and what she sees is the substance of my next chapter.

Chapter Two:
The self-aware blog(ger).

This study seeks to establish how paratextual elements constitute the blog; in the last chapter, I discussed how one of these elements, the infrastructure, works to shape the blogger's identity from a structural point of view, putting the blogger in a particular frame of mind and influencing the content she creates as a result. If the blog's infrastructure can be mapped to the Eames' inner space, and the community and blogosphere as outer space, then the blogger herself is occupies the central position in our journey. This chapter will move from how the software moderates the blogger's identity to theorizing how she works to shape her own identity. Viviane Serfaty's *The Mirror and the Veil*, looks at the American online diary as a location for personal and social influence. Serfaty suggests that the computer screen acts as both a mirror and a veil for the blogger, allowing readers to see themselves reflected in the blog, while limiting the access they have to the blogger herself. The work invites the application of Lacanian theory, though this is something from which Serfaty tends to shy away. She spends only one section in a chapter on social support where she uses the mirror stage as a means for the blogger to provide a "mirror to others" who can in turn provide a "mirror to himself" (57). The application of Lacanian mirror theory, although useful, does not give a completely accurate

depiction of how the blogger's identity develops, however. An exploration of how the electronic body complicates Lacan is required.

In 1991, Donna Haraway pioneered discussion of the electronic body and how it muddies the borders of subjectivity in her work "A Manifesto for Cyborgs,"[24] discussing how the borders between the physical and the informational can blur. The blog – in fact, any electronic communication – certainly works to blur this line; it gives the blogger an informational presence even when they are not physically at their computer. However, Haraway's ideas provide a jumping off point for looking at how digital space of the blog, the software, combines with the needs and capabilities of the audience and the blogger, both in terms of structure and information, to help create the medium of the blog. The audience and blogger are paratextual elements in the creation of blog as medium; like infrastructure, these are central to the development of her identity as blogger; they function as a mirror, reflecting her own image. However, the blogger's identity is more complex than either Haraway or Serfaty theories might imply.

The blogger creates an identity based on the act of blogging, but also through the process of seeing herself being seen and writing and witnessing herself having her ideas and confessions witnessed. Blogging identity is self-reflexive, fluid, and multivalent. In order to catch a glimpse at the fleeting and flickering identity multi-faceted blogger identity, I will create a multi-faceted approach to blog-subjectivity

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[24] Alternately called "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" and "A Cyborg Manifesto." Although Haraway does address the culturally familiar concept of 'cyborg', the term as used in her manifesto is a more generic one, geared towards describing an individual that crosses the border between organic and mechanical. She expands her theory to point to physical/information, and finally signal/noise as further borders to blur.

using Jacques Lacan, who wrote on the formation of identity through the mirror stage; Alfred North Whitehead, who conceived of the subject-superject that signals the death of subjective immediacy; and N. Katherine Hayles, who posits that the coding of language replaces Lacan's floating signifier with a flickering one, therefore breaking the boundary between presence and absence. Ideas from each of these theorists can be combined to create a compound analysis of the subjective blogging experience, and how it reflects the issues at stake in the subjective experience of blogging.

Lacan's lecture "The Mirror Stage" (1949) is useful to uncover the first layer of the blogger's experience. The Lacanian subject looks first at an external reflection of itself, the "Ideal I," and then at its community, the "Social I," in a desire to create its identity. Lacan's mirror model, in which the subject is essentially static, breaks down when applied to the blogger, though, because the blog-self is grounded in informational space, rather than a physical one. In Lacan, the infant misidentifies its reflection as the other; for the blogger, the ideal and social I blend as she looks at her reflection. The image in Lacan's mirror blurs when we move in closer to see the details of the blog-identity, however. Whitehead's concept of the subject-superject, developed in *Process and Reality* (1929) provides a little more clarity. The subject-superject is a *gestalt* of subject and object (the object of its experience), which together form an entity. Whitehead defines the subject as an entity composed of the objects of its experiences. He frustrates the definition, however, by stating that a subject may also be an object of experience for another entity. To return to *Powers of 10*, one can understand this by saying that the

solar system is a subject, composed of the planets, but also the object of the Milky Way. In Whitehead, outside of one's own physical body, the subject does not understand itself as being composed of the objects of her own experience (Nobo 385). Whitehead, writing in the 1920s, could not conceive of the way the digital age would affect the act of being, and how the entity would experience herself. Blogging locates the entity in an informational space where the body and the self have different parameters, because while the electronic subject shares mental space with the physical subject, it is located outside of the body and thus available for self-reflexive observation. This difference in being creates a recursive loop where the blogger is both the subject and object of her own experiences, able to observe herself in a way the physical subject is unable to do.

When we look at the blogger, we look at an *electronic* entity, an electronic body that is at once present and absent. In order to understand the electronic body, I will add a final plane to my theoretical construction of the blogger. N. Katherine Hayles', in *How We Became Posthuman* (1998), provides a frame that can be used to expand Whitehead's subject in order to cover the blogger; the electronic entity understands herself as being composed of the objects of her experience, something Whitehead's subject is denied. This self-reflexivity combined with the constantly moving subject position resets the Lacanian development of identity, causing the blogger to flicker continuously between Ideal and Social I.

Peering at the mirror: Lacan's mirror stage

Lacan placed the formative power of identity in the external body; an individual first gains identity through recognizing his own body reflected in a mirror (*Écrits* 4), but as a "misidentification of himself with the other" (Muller 30) that is reflected by the child's first speaking in the third person (32).[25] By experiencing his exterior self in reflection, he ceases being a collection of objects and start becoming an individual entity. Lacan calls this the "Ideal I," a "primordial form [precipitated] before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (*Écrits* 4). Lacan writes that the mirror stage is "an identification" that sets the individual in "a fictional direction which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone" (4). He argues there is a *jouissance* – a "jubilant assumption of his specular image" (4) – that occurs for the individual in this stage. I would argue there is a new *jouissance* in the blog; there is a joy in learning how to operate within this new self. Like the infant, the blogger is learning how to communicate. Lacan sees the mirror stage as a developmental phase, one the individual quickly grows out of when she enters the social. At this point, the individual shifts away from a reflection of the self as the defining force behind her identity, and centers instead on a social gestalt. The Lacanian subject and the blogger construct identity through the observation of others – in both senses of the phrase. The individual bases her identity on those she observes around her – the "illusion of autonomy" that hides

[25] A parallel to this occurs in the blog; though the blogger often writes in the first person, there is often much third person inserted into the blog itself; the blog is sometimes named after the blogger – as in darrenbarefoot.com – or contains a line after each entry with the blogger's name (or pseudonym) inserted into it, such as "Posted by Dutch", which is added to every post at Sweet Juniper.

the "consciousness of the other" (6); however, her identity is also affected by how she is observed by those around her. It is through the conscious and unconscious responses to and of those around her that she shapes her identity. Unlike the infant, however, the blogger constant flickers between observation of the self and observation of others. The Lacanian mirror is a static entity; once the infant has recognized herself in it, she moves away. The blogger returns every time she starts a new blog entry.

The blogger's mirror stage does not resolve in the same way as Lacan's infant; she forever flickers between social and ideal I, constructing and deconstructing her online identity. This is an *online* identity being built-up and taken apart. The blogger creates a new identity when she starts her blog, an identity that is fundamentally different from the one she inhabits outside of the blog. This blog-self is a posthuman hybrid of text and thought, which is simultaneously present and absent because it transgresses the boundaries between physical and information. The adult who blogs already has a self-concept, but it is constructed around more traditional social relationships, such as coworkers, friends, and family. Her identity as blogger creates a second self for which she must create a new self-concept. Jill Walker describes this process of creation as "discovering a version of my digital self that I had not before been acquainted with" ("Digital Aestheticisation" 3). She sees blogging as "the first step in choosing to express ourselves rather than simply allowing ourselves to be described by others" (6).

The digital self appears as a commonality in many blogs. Eden Kennedy writes at *fussy.org;* but until recently she did so under the persona of "Mrs. Kennedy," a subset of her offline self. Leah Peterson, a blogger who has started interviewing other bloggers to examine the motivations behind their writing, interviewed Kennedy. Kennedy admits

> The deeper answer would be that I grew up in a family where I didn't feel comfortable talking about personal issues, and so to blatantly overcompensate for that constraint I went and found a public place to spill. Making the private public is enormously liberating. But then I also feel I have to make a joke out of it all. It's stupid. But it's a formula that seems to work.

She does not blog about her parents, saying "the way I see my family isn't necessarily the way they should be represented on the Internet." Mrs. Kennedy is happy to write of her own life and thoughts, but only in an immediate manner. Events with her family are for the most part absent.[26] Sue V. confesses "I know that what I portray on my blog is real, however it's definitely just one side of me." Rebecca Blood, on the other hand, has created the identity of a blog historian through her weblog, *Rebecca's Pocket.* She writes, "I am [comfortable being considered an authority], if only because I have been around from almost the start. . . . I usually don't write about personal things. I'm a pretty private person." Other bloggers go even further and take a pseudonym, such as Waiter of Waiterrant, who blogs anonymously about his experiences as a server.

---

[26] Until the recent death of her father, that is. On December 13, 2006, Kennedy shifted her identity from Mrs. Kennedy to Eden Marriott Kennedy. When her father died in May of 2007, she started blogging about her trip back home and her experience with her family.

The blog-self frustrates Lacan's model of identity in several ways: the blog-self exists not as a physical entity, but as an *electronic* one; in addition, it is both dependent on, and independent of, the blogger herself. The Lacanian subject is dependent on a physical reflection and a static location; although the subject misidentifies the Ideal I, it is unquestionably separate from the entities that help define the Social I. The blog-self has no physical component – it exists purely in informational space. The reflection the blogger sees and identifies with flickers between her image and the image of her community. Her subject position is constantly in motion.

Looking into a two-way mirror: Whitehead's subjectivity

Alfred North Whitehead, a mathematician and philosopher of the early twentieth century, began the process philosophy movement in 1929 with his treatise *Process and Reality*. Whitehead's writing is concerned with the process of subjectivity and the experience. He is referenced primarily in the study of metaphysics, as he directed his investigation towards the subject and subjectivity as a way to unfold theological problems. One part of Whitehead's work stands out: his discussion of the subject-superject. He describes the subject-superject as a condition where an individual is "at once the subject experiencing and the superject[27] of its experiences" (43). It "acquires objectivity, while it loses subjective immediacy" in the process of becoming an entity and its subjectivity is "perpetually perishing." (44) In short, the subject-superject is simultaneously subject *and* object. Jorge Luis Nobo explains that "a conscious human

[27] It is notable that Whitehead does not define what he means by 'superject' until almost 30 pages later. A superject is "the atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality." (71)

subject does not normally identify itself with, nor does it understand itself as composed of, the objects it consciously experiences – except of course, in respect to its own body." (385) He argues that Whitehead's line of reasoning is that "the empirical subject and its datum are alike ingredients in the one occasion of experience" (386). Reality is composed of like objects, according to Whitehead, all "enjoying objective immortality" (Sherburne, 15). Jill Walker argues that blogs "are a form of self-presentation and -reflection that is cumulative rather than presented as a definitive whole" (6). The "weblog consists of a continuously expanded collection of posts, each of which is a micro-narrative or a comment that tends to express an aspect of the writer" (6). The blogger is the self-aware sum of her experiences, the subject-superject, and through the act of blogging, is able to achieve her own kind of 'objective immortality'.

The subjective for Whitehead is a constantly decaying moment; it coexists with the objective in creating the experiential entity. In terms of the blogger, the subjective experience is found in self-reflexivity. Serfaty discusses self-reflexivity in online diaries, saying it can "therefore be said to be the representation of inner spaces as well as of the self-consciousness of the post-modern writer, for whom writing primarily is an exploration of the system of signs constituting language" (34). Serfaty argues that this self-reflexivity is "crucial to the slow construction of meaning diarists are engaged in;" the blogger becomes "at the same time the observed and observer: they become the observers of their own lives and play the part of the observed for whoever interacts with them" (35, 64). The blogger needs to be a part of and apart from her blog in order to construct her identity around it.

Bloggers are a curiously introspective group, often and repeatedly examining their motivations behind writing a blog. Jenn, the author of *reappropriate* believes as bloggers, "it is our responsibility to interrogate what we hope to gain out of blogging and to continuously re-examine our intentions." *Reconstruction* published a special issue on blogging in 2006, and asked a handful of bloggers to write an article on why they blog. The responses varied. Michael Bérubé says he is fond of blogging because it helps intellectuals gain "the mediating skills that we knowledge-merchants have to learn" because "the response from readers is more immediate" ("Blogging"). ET at *View from Iran* writes that she first started the blog to communicate with family, but soon found it to be "a way to have a conversation that would be difficult to have any other way" with the rest of the blogosphere. Sokari of *Black Looks* notes that a "starting point in reflecting on identity, blogging and me is to ask the question, 'Where does my writing come from and where does it take me?' . . . Neither the blog nor my identities are mutually exclusive."

Viviane Serfaty writes "the screen is transformed into a mirror onto which diary-writers project the signifiers of their identity in an ongoing process of self-destruction and reconstruction" (Serfaty 14). She later writes that the blog is a mirror, in the Lacanian sense, not for the blogger but rather for her readers, "inviting others to act as a mirror to himself" (57). For Serfaty, the blogger is looking out from behind a one-way mirror she has invoked. I would like to modify Serfaty's idea, and suggest the blogger sits in front of multiple-mirrors created, in part, by the software she has decided to use. However, the image reflected is not that of her readers alone, although certainly they are

there: the image presented is of an electronic version of herself among electronic versions of her readers. The problem, of course, is that the electronic versions of the blogger and her readers indicate an absence as much as they indicate presence. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed how the blogger is both present and absent because their identity exists as an electronic identity. Lacan and Whitehead both use a stable physical presence in order to explain their model of subjectivity; how do we apply them when the blogger is absent? N. Katherine Hayles offers a way in which we can solve the problem of absent presence through her description of flickering signifiers. Hayles extends Donna Haraway's cyborg theory in her discussion of posthumanism. She describes the posthuman as that which "privileges the informational pattern over material instantiation" and "configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines" (2-3). The blog can be seen as an additional method of extending our consciousness; the blog is an extension of the physical body into the electronic.[28] danah boyd suggests the blog itself is the blogger's identity, giving them "a locatable voice and identity in a community" ("Broken Metaphors" 11). In their study on weblog communities, Lilia Efimova, Stephanie Hendrick, and Anjo Anjewierden write, "weblogs are increasingly becoming the *online identities* of their authors" (2). The problem then is to place this within the Lacanian model; how does the online identity work with Lacan's model of identity, when the subject has lost its subjective immediacy?

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[28] Serfaty discusses the role of the body in the online experience in her chapter "Male and Female Cyberbodies." Her analysis, however, is focused on the untangling of gender in the online space, and the role of the physical body in the online diary.

N. Katherine Hayles argues in "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers" that language becomes a code when made electronic due to the programming involved in transforming language from its original form into an "informational structure that emerges from the interplay between pattern and randomness" (30). Unlike the paper-based text familiar to Lacan, electronic text is neither concrete nor static; it exists in a constant state of flux - encoding and decoding, continuously deconstructed and reconstructed through the blog software. Hayles argues:

> Information technologies operate within a realm in which the signifier is opened to a rich internal play of difference. In informatics, the signifier can no longer be understood as a single marker, for example an ink mark on a page. Rather, it exists as a flexible chain of markers bound together by the arbitrary relations specified by the relevant codes. . . . a signifier on one level becomes a signified on the next-higher level (31).

To illustrate how the signifier flickers, one only needs to follow a typical blog entry from entry to display. The first step in any blog entry is to enter it into the blog software's interface. Unlike writing with a pen and paper, the form the entry takes in the blog entry interface does not necessarily match up to the form it will take when later read. The below image illustrates one such interface, from the Movable Type software.

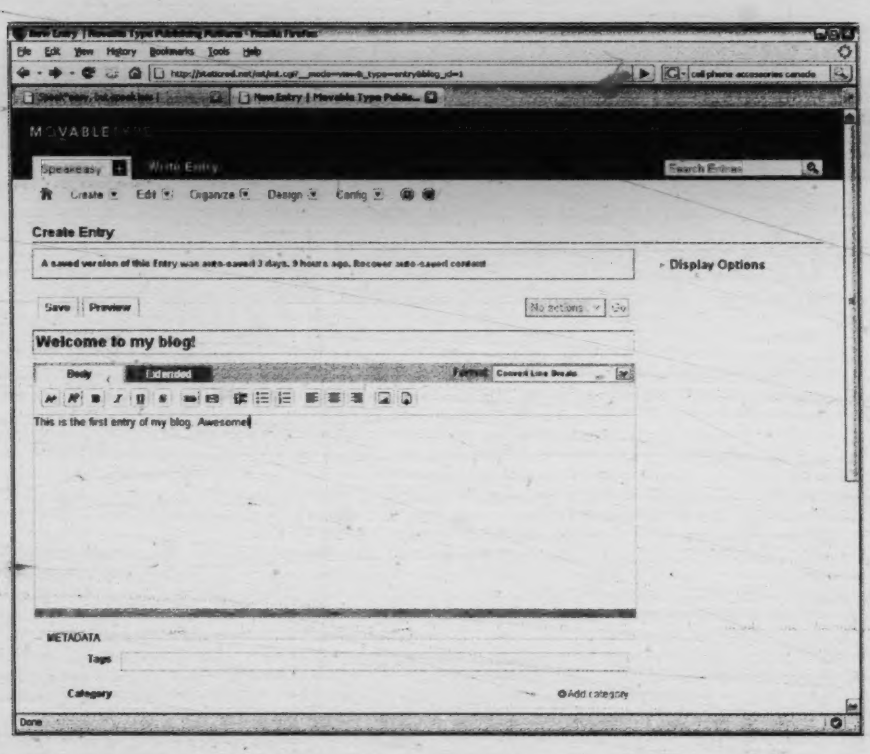

Figure 12: Entering a new blog entry in Movable Type

When the blogger has written her entry, she clicks the save button, and the entry is encoded into query parameters to be passed through the blogging application as a URL. For the above, it may look something like the following:

```
http://staticred.net/mt/mt.cgi?author_id=1&blog_id=1&__mode=save_entry&_type=entry
&return_args=__mode%3Dview%26_type%3Dentry%26blog_id%3D1&magic_token=Nu39Rg08JOlir
5US6HMGiQX49nWNRxkQjQ3rX94e&action_name=&itemset_action_input=&title=Welcome+to+my
+blog%21&convert_breaks=__default__&_text_=This+is+the+first+entry+of+my+blog.+Awe
some%21&text_height=228&text=This+is+the+first+entry+of+my+blog.+Awesome%21&text_m
ore=&tags=&category_ids=&excerpt=&keywords=&status=2&created_on_manual=2007-06-
16+20%3A20%3A19&basename_manual=0&basename_old=&allow_comments=1&to_ping_urls=
```

Each field within the entry interface is given a unique identifier within the query string; the text we placed in the blog's interface is translated as the following parameters in the URL:

```
title=Welcome+to+my+blog%21
_text_=This+is+the+first+entry+of+my+blog.+Awesome%21
created_on_manual=2007-06-16+20%3A20%3A19
```

The parameters pass along the body of the post, along with its title, "Welcome to my blog" and the time it was entered into the software, 8:20:19 pm on June 16, 2007. The query string also contains other information pertinent to the blog entry, such as to which blog the entry appears in or whether to allow comments for the entry. The query string instructs the software to load a script that takes the raw values of each parameter and places them into temporary holding places called variables. Depending on how the blog software was developed, the raw values might be translated into properties of an entry object, such as

```
$entry->entry_title[29] = $_REQUEST['entry_title'];
```

or it may be translated into an array, such as

```
$entry['entry_title'] = $_REQUEST['entry_title'];[30]
```

This temporary holding place allows the programmer to condition data before it is stored in the database (refer to my section in Chapter 1 on normalizing data). After collecting the relevant entry data from the query string, the script passes the information

---

[29] Generally, whether stored as an object property or array, entry data will be given identifiers that match their database identifiers. This isn't a requirement by any means, but rather an issue of convenience for the programmer, especially when working with objects.

[30] The examples given are pseudo-code, and not drawn directly from any particular blog software in order to save space. Blog software draws on complex programming structures, which draw on several different internal functions to save entries.

to its database engine. Though database engines vary from software to software, the format generally looks like the following:

```
INSERT into entry (entry_author, entry_title, entry_body, entry_authoredon)
values(1,'Welcome to my blog','This is the first entry of my blog.  Awesome!','
2007-06-16 20:20:19');
```

The text may also go through a further transformation, replacing HTML Entities, such as apostrophes, quotation marks, and special characters with their ASCII code equivalents. For example, an apostrophe is replaced with ' or an é with ‚. At the end of the process, the original entry looks something like this when stored in the database file:

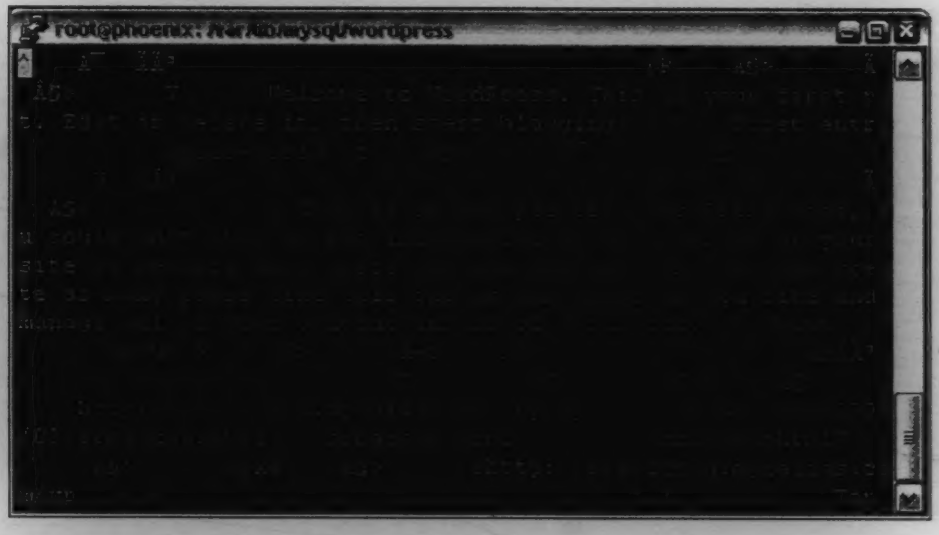

Figure 13: Raw data as it appears in the database file.

This is, of course, very different from the original text; though it does contain human-readable text, it is completely divorced from context.

The reverse process occurs when preparing the blog entry a site visitor will see. Generally, when a visitor requests a blog entry, a script will request the entry from the

database by its specific identification number (*entryid* in the above examples) through a SQL statement:

```
$query = "SELECT * from entries, categories, users where entries.entryid = 13 and
categories.categoryid=entries.categoryid
and users.userid = entries.userid";
$mysql_data = mysql_query($query,$db);
```

The script then stores the returned entry data as an object or array, as in the following example:

```
$entry_array = mysql_fetch_array($mysql_data);
$entry_title = $entry_array['entry_title'];
$entry_body = $entry_array['entry_body'];
$entry_authoredon = $entry_array['entry_authoredon'];
$entry_author = $entry_array['users_name'];
$entry_category = $entry_array['category_name'];
```

Finally, the script creates HTML-based text using the site's configured templates,

```
<table width="100%" cellspacing="0" cellpadding="0" border="0">
  <tr valign="top">
    <td width="70%">
      <p>
      <? echo $entry_body; ?>
      </p>
    </td>
    <td width="30%">
      <p>
      <? echo $entry_title; ?>, authored on <? echo date("F d,
Y",$entry_authoredon); ?> by <? echo $entry_author ?>.  Posted to the <? echo
$entry_category ?> category.
      </p>
    </td>
  </tr>
</table>
```

and displays it to the site visitor. In the above example, the visitor would see something like this:

This is the first entry of my blog. Awesome!

Welcome to my blog, authored on June 16, 2007 by Darren. Posted to the Blog category.

Language has become code exactly as Hayles suggested it would, and goes through several stages of encoding and decoding between its author's creation and its viewing by the site user. At each stage of encoding, the text is divorced from its context, disassembled and reassembled anew. The presence of the blogger is divorced from the text itself in the time it takes to save the entry to its viewing by a reader. Sokari writes that "because of the medium, this presentation can never be complete. So many signifiers of ourselves are missing, the visual, our body language, our personal lives, anxieties, pleasures, family, friends, hobbies, work and the reality of our daily lives" ("Blogging from the borders"). Lacan conceived of the floating signifier to describe how words within a sentence could move between sign and signifier, at least until the sentence is completed. Since language is in a constant state of flux in the blog, always shifting between text and binary, and the blogger can change the text at any time (with no literate record of its change), the division between sign and signifier is much more tenuous.

Hayles uses the flickering signifier to discuss why there has been a shift from a focus on presence / absence to pattern / randomness, because the issue of presence /

absence does not serve to "yield much leverage" when "the avatar both is and is not present" (27). In his MA thesis, *Interactions through the screen*, Marcelo A. Vieta uses Haraway and Hayles to discuss the posthuman self, saying "critically sensitive individuals can usurp the cyborg and posthuman narratives in order to reconstruct our subjectivity and, thus, our sense of self" (26-31). The blogger is at once present and not present because the avatar of her identity is persistent through her blog entries. She simultaneously takes on the subjective roles of author and reader, flickering back and forth between social and ideal I. The Lacanian process of identity formation is denied resolution and the blogger is left to chase the tail of her identity's constantly shifting subject position. Of course, the blogger is not a lone influence; the community around a blog is just as primary a piece of paratext. As I will show in the next chapter, how the blogger shapes her identity is at least partially in response to how her community reacts to past utterances.

Chapter Three:
The view at 100,000,000 light years

In this chapter, we'll look outward into the blogosphere, to the limits of our vision. In the same way the Sun influences the orbit of the Earth, and our solar system is influenced by the Milky Way, the blogger is influenced by the community, both on her own blog and blogs around her. Closest to the blogger herself is the community that grows on her own blog: those who leave comments on her site. This community generally starts small when a blogger is not as well known, but can grow to a very significant size as the blogger becomes more popular. The community on a blog often interacts with each other as well as with the blogger, as the case study of Ze Frank's *The Show* will illustrate. At the next level of magnitude is the community a blogger chooses to join, such as Blog Her or LiveJournal. Because the blogger chooses to join this community, she becomes less of a host to the conversation, and more of a member. This invokes a new method for shaping identity; I will look at how LiveJournal encourages the community to act as interlocutor based on a Foucaultian confessional model. Finally, at the 100,000,000 light year mark, is the blogosphere itself. Like the Eames' film, at this distance we see primarily noise – there is far too much information contained within the frame to comprehend, and the forces of influence that are so clear at the blog and community level are far more

subtle within the blogosphere. At this level, we might as well be in Douglas Adams' Total Perspective Vortex, which works on the basis that

> since every piece of matter in the Universe is in someway affected by every other piece of matter in the Universe, it is in theory possible to extrapolate the whole of creation - every Galaxy, every sun, every planet, their orbits, their composition, and their economic and social history from, say, one small piece of fairy cake.

Of course, the Total Perspective Vortex completely destroys the viewers' brain by showing "the whole infinity of creation and herself in relation to it." There is certainly some significance to being aware that one is part of a blog-universe; however, much like the Eames' vision of furthest perspective we can have on the universe, or the closest we can get to a proton, at some point, all we can see is energy.

The blog is an instant-publication medium; as soon as the blogger clicks the button to post the new entry, her words are made available to the public. Self-observation happens at two levels for the blogger. At one level, she sees herself through her own eyes; the blogger has an identifiable, searchable, and often categorized archive of her diary entries, it is far easier to call up previous entries for reference, updating, or closure, she is the at once observer and observed, signifier and signified. However, the blogger can also see herself through her community. Viviane Serfaty writes that "communities built around a single writer end up developing almost autonomously when room is made for their participation" (63). These kinds of communities do seem to

form, especially around better known bloggers, such as Heather Armstrong and Eden Kennedy, both of whom have active communities of comments on their site.

Joi Ito, an active member of the tech-blog community, CEO of Six Apart Japan, and board member of Technorati, Creative Commons, writes

> We're back to the roots of the Internet, which is really about collaboration . . . . If you look historically – at Minitel, Delphi, or any online service – they always started out thinking they were going to sell packaged products, whether it was content or physical goods, to consumers, and yet at the end of the day most of the people just want to talk to each other. That is what blogs are all about – a group of people talking to each other in a new medium. ("The World Wide Blog")

From the beginning, bloggers have looked at their blogs in terms of community. At first this came in the form of what Rebecca Blood calls cross-blog talk; with the creation of permalinks – URLs that made it easier to post to specific blog entries – bloggers were able to link to and comment on other bloggers' entries (54-55). This, she writes, led to the push for blog software to include the ability for readers to leave comments, since bloggers were already looking to third parties to provide them with comment functionality. The cross-blog talk did not lessen, however; if anything, it became stronger with the introduction of the TrackBack specification in 2002, which automatically notifies the blog software if someone posts a link to a given entry on their

blog (Wikipedia).[31] The time between the original thought and the (potential for) reader response is largely reduced; a reader can potentially respond to a blog post within seconds of its appearance on a site. Ito notes the power of comments and trackbacks in creating conversation: "When somebody links to me I know that they've linked and I can check who's linking to them. . . . If I make an assertion on my blog, which I often do, I will get sometimes hundreds of comments, automatically posted on my blog" ("World Wide Blog"). In cases where Trackback is not available or configured, the blogger can also look at her site statistics and get a list of referring sites (sites that link to her blog or a specific entry within it).[32]

Comments allow readers to respond to a given entry in an online journal with their own thoughts and reflections. They allow the reader to chat with other members of the community or the blogger herself. Through comments, the reader works with the blogger to discover truth; they decipher what the blogger has written. In a post to her site community in 2003, Heather Armstrong wrote,

> So I went back through the archives and was reminded that I have a real appreciation for most of the people who read and comment on this website, that many of you are very funny and sympathetic and wonderfully, refreshingly frank about your own lives. And because of you I don't want to focus on the

[31] Both the blog linking to the original post and the blog hosting the original post needed to have TrackBack enabled. However, since the TrackBack specification is an open standard, it has been integrated into many blog software tools.

[32] Before the advent of blog spam and referrer spam, many websites such as Dean Allen's Textism would contain lists of the most recent referrers, both as a convenience for the blogger to see where her visitors were coming from, but also as a way of advertising her place within the blogging community as a whole. This practice waned when spam website operators discovered they could have their websites placed in these lists with little or no effort (see the Wikipedia entry on Referer Spam for more information).

> negative feedback I get from those 3-4 people a day who can't wait to tell me how much they hate me. And it's because of you that I don't want to remove the comments option from my posts. ("Dear Reader")

As Armstrong became more prolific within the blogging community, she was forced to turn off comments on her site due to their content.[33] She explained how she handles comments in a post on March 15, 2007:

> 1. I do not open comments on every post because I do not think every post needs any additional commentary, or because I am not going to be around to make sure everyone is playing nicely.
>
> 2. On posts that do allow comments, I usually close them within 24-48 hours because the discussion has usually ended at that point. Plus, it keeps everyone nimble.
>
> 3. Occasionally I will turn comments off earlier without warning just so that I can get email like yours, full of bravery and courage, a warm kiss on the nose like a steaming Prozac burp. ("Exclamation Point")

---

[33] One can also make a weblog 'members only,' requiring readers to sign up as members and log in to them, or find an alternate means to protect the entry. There are only a small number of weblog applications that will allow authors to create 'members only' weblogs; Wordpress is one of the more popular blogging applications that supports protecting entries. It is notable, however, that Wordpress is often difficult for the novice to configure. One can also secure the content of their website by using server-side means; this, however, requires a much higher level of technical knowledge to implement. This requires some basic knowledge of the web server the journal is being run on. On Apache, this requires setting up additional files on the web server - .htaccess and .htpasswd. Though there are utilities that will help generate the required syntax in these files, one must still have enough knowledge to transfer the files to the correct location on the web server.

Turning off comments has not quieted her community, of course. She still receives a lot of email through the site, as the above post suggests, some of which she will occasionally reference on her site. However, it has lessened the power of the more negative members of her community by taking away their public voice, and only exposing it in order to further lessen its power through ridicule. In this way comments act as a proof of a kind of witnessing, serving to give absolution or penance.

The kind of confession/witnessing model used by most blogs can be mapped onto the ritual of confession in the Catholic Church where the confessor speaks their sins through a screen to a priest and the priest assigns penance and grants absolution to an anonymous sinner. Viviane Serfatay writes that the screen "offers protection against the gaze of others" (Mirror and the Veil 32);[34] offering the protection of the confessional booth. The confessor enters the blog's "new entry" page to privately compose their entry, which operates like a screened booth that obscures the view. Once the confession is made, it is reviewed by her audience. The confessing ritual is for community bloggers much as it is for religious confessions, however; although the act is meant to be private and anonymous, it is not often practiced as such; people confess at their own churches where they will recognize the priest's voice, and perhaps he will recognize theirs. One might be observed by regular parishioners going into a confession booth – or, alternatively, never entering it. The community is in some way always aware of the presence of confession, even when they are not always privy to its contents. However,

[34] I would argue that the blogger is protected from the gaze of others not because she is behind the screen/mirror, but because she is part of the community, watching herself alongside them.

where community-blog confession differs from its traditionally practiced counterpart is in the relationship between confession and absolution. In the Catholic confessional, confession and absolution are synchronous activities – sins confessed, absolution granted, and penance prescribed within a single visit. In anonymous online confessionals, the confession and absolution – or at least the confession and witnessing – are asynchronous; it could be hours or days between the confession and its witnessing.

In the third volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes that confession emerged as a "ritual for the production of truth," out of the Lateran Council in 1215 to become "a central role in the order of civil and religious powers" (58). Foucault continues,

> We have since become an extraordinarily confessing society. Confession has spread its effects far and wide: in the judicial system, in medicine, in pedagogy, in familial relations, in amorous relationships, in everyday life and in the most solemn rituals; crimes are confessed, sins are confessed, thoughts and desires are confessed, one's past and one's dreams are confessed, one's childhood is confessed; one's diseases and problems are confessed. (59)

Every linguistic act becomes a form of confession for Foucault, and it makes sense that his assertions would transfer over to the medium of the blog. By speaking the confession the "discourse of truth finally takes effect, not in the one who receives it, but in the one from whom it is wrested" (62). The power of the blog-confession is in the act. Ananda Mitra writes, "the Internet space is indeed a cacophony of voices, all

of whom feel empowered, and the traditional definition of dominance becomes nearly inapplicable. . . . [it] is a space where power is manifest in discursive capital" (690). For authors of community-based journals and individual-based journals with an active community, every online utterance is a confession, whether it is a reflection on their career, complaints about their love life, or a retelling of their trip to the hairdresser. When a blogger posts an entry it has the potential to be viewed by millions; and, as Mitra points out, it is the size of the audience that counts. If only subconsciously, bloggers do have the perception that at least a few people will see their entries, and it is possible that at least one person will say 'me too, you'll be fine.'

"It's just like TV, but with pimples": Ze Frank

Ze Frank's *The Show*, a year-long experiment in video blogging, started with a commitment to community involvement. *The Show* debuted on March 17, 2006 as a way for Frank to, as he describes have "a conversation between the host and the viewers of the program" ("About"). Although he initially engaged with his audience through comments on each entry, this quickly evolved into a far more interactive relationship. Frank made a point of highlighting comments on his site; in the April 4, 2006 episode of *The Show* he includes the first mention of one of his comments: "Yesterday, Amy left a comment saying, 'Hey, since you're already thinking so I don't have to, would you mind running my errands as well?' I can't run your errands! I

don't even know where you live! That's crazy!" ("04-04-06").[35] It proved popular enough that he starts his "S-s-s-somethin' From the Comments" segment the very next episode, which becomes a frequent inclusion within his episodes. Frank routinely solicited his audience for content ideas, and asked them to submit photos, short video clips, and t-shirt designs. He refers to his audience as "Sports Racers" and occasionally appoints them to The League of Awesomeness based on their comments, "Power Moves,"[36] or content submissions. Appointment to the League is signified by granting them special names, such as "Smooth Jammer," "Razor Kitten," "Bonesaw," and "The Crusher."

The number of comments left on *The Show* episodes grew between the first and 99th episode [37], when he stopped regularly allowing comments.[38] It is not clear why he made this decision, but it likely has to do with his thoughts on comments and community involvement. In the May 12th episode, he responded to some of his commenters and their dislike of people posting "First!" in the comments. "Sports Racers don't follow artificially imposed rules on conversation spaces," he wrote. "That's why when I get back, I'm gonna start building Comment

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[35] Except where noted, all citations come from the list of transcripts on the zefrank.com wiki, and are referred to by the date of the episode. These transcripts have been created by Frank's community.

[36] Frank referred to the Power Move in the first episode of *The Show*, but it wasn't until the April 6, 2006 episode that a power move was seen. Frank's power move, "Thunderclaw," has a vaguely martial arts feel to it, something which would be reflected in later submissions from his community. The first highlighted power move was in the April 10, 2006 episode from Maiko. For more information on the Power Move and a list of all highlighted moves, refer to the "Power Move" entry in the zefrank.com wiki.

[37] Comment counts over 200 are coloured red. NOTE: This is a sparkline, an in-text graph first conceived of by Edward Tufte. For more information, please refer to http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=0001OR

[38] Ze attempted to move his community away from a comment-based system several times over the show's history, creating the wiki, the forum, and finally *The Org*, a community-based website that allowed users to see other Speed Racers in their local area, create groups, upload videos and photos.

King of the Hill." ("05-12-06"). Comment King of the Hill allowed the audience to vote on comments on the site, giving a higher position within the list of comments for people who received many positive votes, and a lower position for people who received many negative votes.

Michael Newman suggests that Ze Frank elevates his community from simple fan-fic creators to "a more egalitarian relationship between primary and secondary creative personnel. In effect, the secondary personnel are less secondary" (3). Ze Frank acknowledges the interaction with his viewers often, including his June 8th, 2006 show where he says "You know Sports Racers there's still not that many of us. Take a second to look around and see what we've made together. It's pretty awesome. Thanks" ("06-08-06"). In June 2006, Frank set up a wiki for his audience to start documenting the show, which continues to be edited after the end of "The Show." Frank's level of involvement with his audience was most evident with Fabuloso Friday, an experiment he announced on his June 5th entry. Frank describes Fabuloso Friday as "where you make the show for me. Everything I say and do except no nudity" ("06-05-06"). Users were pointed to the wiki to collaborate on the script, which was completed and sent to Frank three days later. The script submitted was full of the viewers' favourite *The Show* recurring themes, but was otherwise similar to many of Frank's other shows.[39]

[39] He tried a similar experiment the next week, asking his viewers to write complete 15-second segments, which his audience could then vote on the following week.

Fabuloso Friday was not the first community project, however. On May 16th, Frank challenged his audience saying,

> The League of Awesomeness has discovered that never before have two pieces of bread been simultaneously placed on the ground directly opposite each other on the globe, thus making an Earth sandwich. The fact that the Earth has never been a sandwich is probably why things are so fucked up. The first team to document and prove that they've successfully made an Earth sandwich will get a League of Awesomeness certificate and something else. The challenge will run through 300 arbitrary units of time."

On June 12th two brothers successfully completed the task, making an earth sandwich between New Zealand and Portugal. Frank has also employed his community to create a jingle, commercial, and product design for an imaginary cereal product based on Mel Gibson's drunk tirade of July 28, 2006, to first purchase, then design a t-shirt design for a German audience member who complained that the shirts were too expensive ("06-07-06", "06-08-06"), and has played a game of chess on an episode-by-episode basis with his community. Perhaps the largest scale of community participation occurred with the Human Baton project, announced by Frank on November 29th. The Human Baton, a community member named Luke Vaughn, was attempting to spend his Christmas break traveling across the US using only other community members for travel, food, and lodging.

Frank gave some early insight into his thoughts on community in a 2004 talk at the TED conference:

> I get a lot of joy out of tech . . . making things actually does give me a lot of joy . . . I started getting interested in creating online social spaces to share that feeling with people who don't consider themselves artists. We're in a culture of guruship. It's so hard to use some software because it's unapproachable. People feel like they have to read the manual. So, I tried to create these very minimal activities to allow people to express themselves. . . . it's peripheral activities like these that allow people to get together, doing fun things they actually get to know each other. It's like low threshold peripheral activites I think are the key to bringing up social capital I think we are lacking. ("What's so funny about the web?")

It is clear that this was the genesis of *The Show*; he wanted to explore the medium of the blog and how it can be used to build community. As it turns out, before beginning *The Show*, Frank was consulting with the television industry on conversational media and could not a "shining example" (Miracle). He has filled that void, if the response of his community is any example.

Blogging communities: Blog Her

Ze Frank and Heather Armstrong illustrate two models of community within the blog itself; Armstrong works with her community at a distance in the search for her identity, while Frank's community takes a much more (inter)active role. Both

Armstrong and Frank show how the community within a blog opens a conversation between the blogger and her readers, and how that conversation can shape the identity of the blogger. This conversation is not the only conversation a blogger undertakes, however. She also enters into a conversation with the bloggers around her.

BlogHer is a community of (mostly) blogging women started in 2005 by bloggers Lisa Stone, Elisa Camahort, and Jory Des Jardins. Stone, Camahort, and Des Jardins originally conceived of BlogHer as a conference for blogging women "that enables women bloggers to tesseract to *proactive* social and intellectual networking with each other" ("Blog*her*con 2005"). Melissa Summers (Suburban Bliss), Alice Bradley (Finslippy), Heather Armstrong (Dooce), Margeret Mason (Mighty Girl) and Eden Kennedy (Fussy) attended the first BlogHer conference in 2005 and instantly created a small, tight-knit community with each other. The first BlogHer conference was "too 'Silicon Valley'" (Mandajuice), but later conferences have seen BlogHer starting to get settled into something more comfortable. Melissa writes

> I've never done well with large groups of women (*see MOMS Club) and I think that's why my experience last year was so overwhelming. I'd gone to a women's conference and I'd met women I'd had a connection with before arriving and it turned out I really did like other women. Er...well, not in that way (except Alice). But I always thought I wasn't good at having female

> friends and here I am a year later with a core group of female friends who are making this latest round of therapy seem conquerable. ("Sandwiched")

Heather Powazek Champ had a similar experience at BlogHer 2006. She starts her recollection of the event by claiming she is "terrified by women". After attending the conference, however, she writes, "BlogHer was great. I met some wonderful women (Alice, Eden, Gayla, Leah, Jen and Melissa), got to hang out with old friends (Andrea, Heather and Lori) and be reminded of how wonderfully creative and strong women are" ("What I Learned at BlogHer").

After the first BlogHer conference, Des Jardins posted an updated mission statement for the Blog Her Advisory Council, announcing the creation of a "robust web network equipped with the tools we need to deliver on the education, exposure and community of women bloggers, branching out beyond the blog to create a true community resource and meeting place" ("BlogHer Vision"), which led to the creation of the BlogHer Community Hub. The community hub gives blogging women a place to list and share the content of their blogs,[40] as well as converse with other women blogging. Content-based categories are provided in the hub, which makes it easier to find other women blogging with a specific area.

An initial level of classification occurs when the blogger lists her site in BlogHer: she self-identifies as female, and sets herself apart from male bloggers by

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[40] The blog list is maintained by a group of editors, who evaluate each blog submitted. Valid link submissions are those from women, men who have attended the BlogHer conference, or men "whose blogging is of particular quality and relevance to the women who participate in and read BlogHer, as determined by an editor" ("List a Blog")

listing in BlogHer. The bloggers that join the BlogHer community are given the opportunity to title, describe, and further classify their blogs within the blog listings. Although the classification makes it simple to find other bloggers that share the same interests in an attempt to form community, it also has the effect of further guiding the blogger into a given identity.[41] Is her blog a Mommy & Family blog? An Art & Design blog? What about Race? Law? Technology? Listing herself on BlogHer forces the blogger to think in detail about her identity, and reinforce a genre already imposed upon them both by themselves and their blog software. It also is an active gesture of participation, in that the blogger includes themselves within a community of like minds.

Forgive me reader, for I have sinned: LiveJournal

Acknowledging blogging as a conversation within community is critical; an overriding motivation for bloggers is the urge to communicate, both with their readers, and with the greater community. Why do bloggers have this overwhelming urge to communicate, however? Marcelo A. Vieta argues the act of blogging "can be viewed as simultaneously extending the blogger into the realm of the public while, at the same time, bringing the public into the private realm of the blogger" (124). Livejournal is a good example of how the confession model comes into play in the development of a blogger's identity. Similar interactions occur between bloggers and readers within individual blogs, but LiveJournal's focus on community and

[41] Blogs can be placed into more than one classification

community involvement makes the influence of the confessory model on the blogger much easier to see and produce. Producing confession on independent journal sites – weblogs – takes a higher level of technical knowledge. The weblog author must register a domain, secure hosting, install and configure one of the many blogging software packages (or ask their hosting provider to install and configure it), and set up some basic HTML to personalize it and add links to other sites. In short, the weblog author must first build their confessional booth before they can use it. Despite the technical barrier, many people choose to register their own domains and set up an online journal out of a desire to set themselves apart from the flock, and be perceived as individuals, rather than a small part of a collective. Yet, the content of weblogs is often limited to two main forms of confession: the personal public and individual confession. Personal public confession offers an often-censored view of the confessor's personal life; confessors often write within a limited community, or entirely outside of community. Individual confession occurs when the independent journaler restricts access to her confessions to a select few witnesses. People with their own weblogs may want to have more control over their online space. Owning their own domain allows them to control both the content and the means of its production. LiveJournal offers journal-style blogs and places a great emphasis on community and user interaction ("What is LiveJournal"). It is set up in such a way that discussion between journal authors is almost unavoidable: comments are enabled by default on new members' journals, member communities are easy to find

and join; and people are brought together quickly and easily by regional proximity, shared interests, and the desire to speak and be witnessed.[42]

The LiveJournal user has the benefit (or, as in the case of some communities, the detriment) of a community of fellow bloggers which can not only witness confession, but interact with her. LiveJournal users' confessions have more built-in witnesses than any other form of online journal due to the nature of the site. When a user posts to LiveJournal, the post appears simultaneously on her online journal and in the Friends page of those users who have identified her as a friend.[43] Her confession is produced and reproduced potentially hundreds or even thousands of times in a single instant; the limit of reproduction is restricted only by the number of people she has indicated as friends. LiveJournal combines the pull technology of the blog (in which the reader has to go to the blogger's website to look for new entries) with push technology (in which they are notified of new entries) through the Friends page.[44] The Friends list serves a dual purpose, however. The Friends list allows their friends to know when a new entry is posted, but it also gives the blogger the ability to restrict access to their journal to members of their Friends list. The blogger writing on LiveJournal knows exactly who they are writing to every time they post a new entry. This is important in terms of the confessory model; the blogger is creating her own interlocutor through her Friends list,

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[42] See the Livejournal section in Chapter One for technical details on LiveJournal communities.

[43] LiveJournal sets up a rudimentary social networking scheme through their Friends page. Adding friends is simple – simply click on the LiveJournal user's profile, and then click the *Add This User to Your Friends List* icon.

[44] RSS readers offer the same type of functionality. Unlike the RSS reader, however, LiveJournal gives the blogger visibility into who is reading their site, and the ability to regulate access on a user-by-user basis.

and looks to them for satisfaction of the confessory impulse.[45] Still, there are entries made by both blogger and LiveJournal users that they would prefer to be viewed only by a select group of people, or remain completely confidential. LiveJournal offers this ability through a selection box titled "Show this entry to." In this box the LiveJournal user can set an entry to 'friends only' – entries that can only be people the user has identified as 'friends' [46] - or to "Just Me," which remains viewable only to the user, much like an entry in a paper diary would. In this way the LiveJournal user can select her interlocutors.

Entries on an individual's LiveJournal can be posted to community groups, such as the "Rehab for (Recovering) Academics" group.[47] As a result, members of these

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[45] LiveJournal's Kevin Krim reports that nearly 25% of all LiveJournal entries are set to Friends Only. (Sullivan).

[46] Another strategy is to use comments in the HTML code, which are automatically ignored and not displayed by a web browser. The only way to discover their existence is to look at the source of a given web page. Comments are indicated in an HTML document by surrounding a section of text with <!– and –> and look like the following:

Today, I went to the dentist to get my wisdom tooth pulled. <!--// I was scared out of my tree, and hoped the sedative he gave me worked wonders. It didn't, really – the sedative didn't work at all. // –> It didn't really hurt, but I felt sickened by the crunching noise when he took it out.

The casual witness, when loading the page, does not see the commented text. She sees something along the lines of the following:

Today, I went to the dentist to get my wisdom tooth
pulled. It didn't really hurt, but I felt sickened by
the crunching noise when he took it out.

The reader would only see the comment if he viewed the page's HTML source. It was a very effective way of 'publicly' confessing to a limited audience; only a select few knew enough about HTML to catch my comments in the first place, and they only knew to do so because I told them they were there to find. To take this to its logical end, a confession could be limited to hiding confessions in comment text restricts the witnessing audience even further; if the author does not tell anyone of their existence, it is likely nobody will witness the confession beyond the author. This is a 'safe' way to satisfy the confessory impulse without the danger of the confession being found; it bypasses the need for an interlocutor.

[47] This group defines itself as a "community that caters to people involved in or recovering from higher education. It probably has an attitude problem" (http://www.LiveJournal.com/community/academics_anon).Curiously enough rockstarbob, who founded and maintains this recovering academics group, appears to have fiddled with Foucault in his past.

groups often build a community of online peers who work to elicit the confession. *Love and Academia* is "a community for serious university/college and graduate students (plus their significant others, prospective grad students, grad student counselors, postdocs, actual professors/instructors, lecturers, etc.) to discuss the particular good and bad things about mixing relationships and serious study" ("loveandacademia profile"). Bloggers post to the group seeking advice, which the community collaborates to answer. Aussie Annie recently posted to the group seeking advice:

> So much time spent in my own (little cognitive) world... Submission of dissertation merely weeks away. It's not just the "writing" that steals my time, it's the *thinking* in between. Then, suddenly I'm exhausted, and I go to the sofa to watch TV with significant other, only to find she doesn't like to share the remote control anymore, or let me 'have-a-say' in what we watch... "listen here..." she says... "you can't just come barging in here and make me change the channel"
>
> Then it hits me with a sense of dread... we've spent so much of our evening-time over the last few years apart, me ~ with ear-plugs in my ears and a book in my hand, her ~ with her remote, or a cross-stitch... Either way, once my PhD is submitted, what will happen? Will we find some common-ground like we used to?

Although his own personal page is for "friends only" he has opened up his "non friends only page" as a confessional space, one where a mix of anonymous and identified posters both confess and plead him to let them be his "friends" in the LiveJournal sense of the word. rockstarbob appears to be enjoying his role as interlocutor.

She received 10 comments (6 of which she replied to) assuring her that her relationship will recover from the distance the work on her dissertation had created, and discussing how moving out of the dissertation is as much a transition as starting school in the first place. One commenter, starstraf, also offered her perspective as the partner of a PhD student, writing

> Much of my life isn't mine to control - I have no say when the dissertation is done, and then what will happen after - who knows - depends on where he finds a position and such. So I feel that i have very little 'control' in my life so if I want to grasp hold and not let go of those few things that I can control (say the remote) then I'm going to do so.

Windsweptvoid posted to loveandacademia on asking for the group's experience with long distance relationships, and received over 20 replies, including Swiggett, who wrote that she and her husband spent the first 9 months of their relationship long distance and offered several suggestions for how to negotiate it. Sailrox posted to the group March 6, 2007 asking how to handle the "youthful exuberance" her boyfriend is exhibiting after reading Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. The replies are interesting, in that they follow a very academic direction: "give him an opposing viewpoint," "give him some of the critiques of scientific/positivistic principles," and to do what "(good) faculty members do in first-year courses" by giving him other viewpoints.

The confession and absolution found on these groups are not always positive; sometimes a confessor seeks often penance, rather than absolution. *Bitch on my Back* is a

pro-ana community on LiveJournal. Members of this community post here when they are feeling discouraged in their attempts to maintain their lifestyle. "univrslmistress," for example, writes that she "can't seem to stay triggered"[48] and begs, "please help me" (np). The reply she receives, from a fellow community member, is the following:

> congradulations, youre now officially an ana poser and a waste of life. scones? candy?? the last thing on your mind should be sweets and shit like that. 112 is a respectable weight, but you couldve done better. youre a disgrace. how could you let it get so bad?

It is important to note that the confessor does receive absolution for her confession; she does not post to this group because she wants someone to notice her anorexia and attempt to correct it, but rather to confirm her suspicion that she is not trying hard enough to keep it up. Interestingly enough, the interlocutor works within this model. Although she says some very harsh words (such is the nature of the community), she also acknowledges that this is what the confessor is seeking; she ends the post with "I love you :)." The group's charter outlines this relationship between confessor and interlocutor explicitly:

> This community is for those that are already part of ana, mia, and/or ednos. It is created solely for support - HOWEVER - it is created for harsh criticisms and support. . . . Wouldn't you love to have hundreds of girls bitching at you about

[48] Pro-ana community members vary on how they define their lifestyle. According to Wikipedia, members alternately deny the lifestyle as a disease and accept that it is a disease, but that they have a choice to seek recovery or not. "Triggering" is a term used by both the pro-ana and psychiatric community to indicate material (whether visual or textual) that incites an anorexic or eating disorder sufferer to continue their behaviour. (See N. Fox, K. Ward, and A O'Rourke, and K Dias for examples).

how fat you are and how you need to step away from the chocolate cake and onto that treadmill? i know i would so PROMOTE AWAY =D

The group's rules[49] support this assertion; you must be active in the community to stay within it.[50] *Bitch on my back* is not unique in their assertions on community; as Isabela Granic and V. Lamey assert that the Internet has created a self-regulatory culture, giving the example of netiquette (98-9). A community is policed by its members: they ensure conversation stays in line with the community's charter and work to defuse any disagreements between them.

Who's reading the blog?

This is the question on the mind of many bloggers, who check their comments – often getting email notifications when they are left – and check their site statistics religiously. Blogs are not created in isolation for an audience of one; the blogger expects an audience, whether it is a community they invite to their blog through allowing comments, a community they join, or an anonymous group of readers indicated only by the blog's visitor count. Ze Frank knew the strength of community when he started *The Show*; he experimented with it to explore how interactive a medium the blog could be. Likewise, the members of Blog Her join in a dual attempt to reach a larger group of people, while joining a community of like-minded peers; even the LiveJournal user, through her Friends list and communities opens her identity up to greater scrutiny.

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[49] http://www.LiveJournal.com/community/ana_is_my_soul/370.html

[50] You also have to show you have credibility within the community; you must enter a form outlining the length and severity of your eating disorder before being granted membership to the group.

Community resists the blogger's control, as Heather Armstrong has discovered; even when the blogger attempts to limit the influence a community has on her, they will find a way to assert it. All bloggers are a part of the greater community of the blogosphere, just as all galaxies are part of the universe, and the forces that affect the universe also affect all the elements within it.

"Written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle[51]": Beyond current research

I began this study looking at the blog as many academics have: as an extension of the self into the digital. This is a useful approach; there is an autobiographical aspect behind every blog and the work done to uncover the self-referential quality of blogging is important. In working with the medium of the blog, however, I began to see the autobiographical aspect of blogging as part of a much larger process of identity formation. Bloggers create and recreate an electronic identity that weaves in and out of the traditional models of self. A more comprehensive model, which incorporates the community around the blog as well as the blog itself is needed to theorize the creation of a blog-self. This model is the beginning of a unified theory of blog identity and one that, like string theory in physics, ties together elements at both the micro and macro level of the blog.

Over the past three chapters, I have looked at the blog and its effect on identity through three contextual spaces, using *Powers of* 10 as a point of reference. Occupying inner space is the blog's interface and infrastructure, which leads the blogger into a given genre of writing, such as the online journal, and how that works to shape her identity. Using a layered theoretical approach, I've shown how – at the surface level – the blogger contributes to the development of her identity. I've looked at the blog-self

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[51] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler, No. 4*. Saturday, 31 March 1750.

through a modified Lacanian model of identity formation, examined how the several layers of encoding and decoding involved in the production of the blog can serve to mutate the sign/signifier, as N Katherine Hayles suggests it might, and argued that this can unintentionally guide the development of the blogger's identity. Finally, in outer space is the community around the blogger. It aids and abets the development of a blogger's identity by locating it within interaction, genre, and confession. Ze Frank's *The Show* and Heather Armstrong's Dooce illustrate how communities form around a blog and create conversation between the blogger and her community. Communities of bloggers such as *Blog Her* show the blogger finding community and creating an identity for herself among those peers; when a community is combined with the genre of the diary, as in LiveJournal, one can see how Foucault's confessional model is at play in terms of developing the blogger's identity, and how community takes the place of a single interlocutor.

Where do we go from here?

The issues of blog identity, its formation and operation, are but one area of the blog that deserves critical attention. Blog software and technology deserve further exploration as do paratextual elements of the blog such as RSS syndication and the public weblog aggregators such as Technorati or SaskBlogs.[52] RSS syndication, an alternate form of blog publication in which the content of the blog posting – in part or as a whole – is offered for easy integration into other websites, has created a condition in which the identity of the blogger can occupy multiple locations simultaneously. How

[52] http://saskblogs.catprint.ca

does identity work when it is distributed? Aggregators use these RSS feeds to duplicate content from a given blog to their own site, which creates a larger potential audience for the blogger. The existence, growth, and use of weblog tracking software, prevalent amongst bloggers, is another area that deserves more critical attention.

Representation of identity should also be considered in future studies. The creation of fictional bloggers first highlighted in the case of Kaycee Nicole Swenson works to complicate the issues of identity in, audience of, and usage of the blog. Kaycee Nicole started writing a personal journal in 1999 and publicly announced she was dying from liver failure due to cancer. Her death of an aneurism was announced on her blog on May 15, 2001. On the 18th, a post titled "Is it possible Kaycee Nicole did not exist?" appeared on Metafilter, a popular link blog. It quickly emerged that Kaycee Nicole was not real; nobody had ever met her in person, and photos posted of her online turned out to be of Julie Fulbright, a high school basketball player in Kansas. Within a matter of days, Kaycee's story fell apart, and it was revealed that she never existed. Debbie Swanson, who had previously posed as Kaycee's mother, admitted that she had fabricated Kaycee as a gestalt of several cancer sufferers she claimed to have known. How does the creation of a community around a false identity affect that community when the truth is revealed? Does the confessory act still have weight if it is false?

The open adoption of blogging by non-traditional and traditional companies also complicates the issue of identity and usage, especially when blogs are written by several authors. In 2000, Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger

wrote *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, which foresaw the need for corporations to open up a conversation with their customers. It's clear given the corporate activity in blogging and other social media such as Facebook that their call has been heard. What issues arise? Corporate blogging began with smaller companies such as Chicago's 37Signals, a web-based company centered around productivity applications, and has since been embraced by large companies such as Microsoft, who supported Robert Scoble's evangelical blog from 2005 to 2006. Does an organization have an identity in the way we understand the blogger's? And if so, how is it affected by the community around it? There is a real danger for companies starting a blog that they will be accused of astroturfing,[53] unless they are open about their objectives. Furthermore, how is the blog changed when it is written by a celebrity, such as Kevin Smith, Rosie O'Donnell, or Michael Moore? Is the celebrity engaging in the same creation and development of identity as the non-celebrity, or do they operate more along the lines of a corporate blog, existing primarily to create positive publicity for itself?

Bloggers have also found many uses for their blogs outside of autobiographical and confessional practices, identity and community formation, simple self-publicity. Blogs are also used for creating commentary on political issues, such as the weblogs of Calgary Grit and Michelle Malkin. Blogs like Margaret Mason's *Mighty Goods* review products and Mario Armando Lavandeira's *Perez Hilton* follow celebrity. They

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[53] Astroturfing refers to the creation of false grassroots movements by corporations or political organizations to create positive publicity for themselves. Notable astroturfers include Microsoft's Americans for Technology Leadership, a group that orchestrated a false letter writing campaign (Weisman) and the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, who were a Republican-funded organization formed to weaken John Kerry's war record as a means to weaken his presidential bid. (Factcheck.org)

document trade tricks and trips, as in Matthew Baldwin's *Tricks of the Trade*. Blogs are media centers used for archiving links, maintaining a blogroll, keeping a calendar, checking weather updates, accessing photos, and acting as homepages. Millions of North Americans have or have read blogs and are participating in other popular social media such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, and AOL Instant Messenger.

The blog is a new technology in a long line of new technologies criticized as the "entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account" (Johnson 1750). The book, made more available to the layperson with the introduction of Gutenberg's printing press sparked theological and intellectual debate about the problems of moving knowledge out of the seminary and onto the street. The novel changed story-telling, but when it first appeared in Britain, Vicessimus Knox derided it, saying

> In vain is youth secluded from the corruptions of the living world. Books are commonly allowed without restriction, as innocent amusements, yet these often pollute the heart in the recesses of the closet, inflame the passions at a distance from temptation, and teach all the malignity of vice in solitude. . . . They fix attention so deeply, and afford so lively a pleasure, that the mind once accustomed to them cannot submit to the painful task of serious study.

The blog is just finding its legs as a medium, and already it is positioning itself as socially influential. Blogging has had its fair share of criticism; mainstream media and even new media analysts initially played down the importance of the medium. Paul Grabowicz, called the blog "a vanity press" (Kornblum); Bill Keagy reduced the blog to a genre "known for personal information, much of it boring" (Walker 2001). George Packer refers to blogging as "meta-comment by very bright young men who never leave their rooms". The critic's practice of reducing the blog to personal journal and diary, is according to danah boyd, "demean[ing] a practice they see as threatening" (2004). As academics, we must push past the new medium's knee-jerk detractors and look beyond the limits social media has in place today, just as researchers pushed looked beyond the limits in *Powers of 10* to find the quark and other subatomic particles. There is far more for academics to discover about this new medium, and I look forward to discovering it with them.

Appendix I:
Movable Type Database Structure

Database Table	Description	Fields
mt_author	Stores information about the authors on the server.	author_id author_name author_nickname author_password author_email author_url author_can_create_blog author_can_view_log author_hint author_created_by author_public_key author_preferred_language author_created_on author_modified_by author_api_password author_remote_auth_token author_remote_auth_username author_is_superuser

Database Table	Description	Fields
		author_modified_on author_type
mt_blog	Stores information on the blogs stored on the server and their configuration (title, path on the server, and other settings).	blog_id blog_name blog_description blog_site_path blog_site_url blog_archive_path blog_archive_url blog_archive_type blog_archive_type_preferred blog_days_on_index blog_language blog_file_extension blog_email_new_comments blog_email_new_pings blog_allow_comment_html blog_autolink_urls blog_sort_order_posts blog_sort_order_comments blog_allow_comments_default blog_allow_pings_default

Database Table	Description	Fields
		blog_server_offset
		blog_convert_paras
		blog_convert_paras_comments
		blog_status_default
		blog_allow_anon_comments
		blog_words_in_excerpt
		blog_ping_weblogs
		blog_ping_blogs
		blog_ping_others
		blog_mt_update_key
		blog_autodiscover_links
		blog_welcome_msg
		blog_archive_tmpl_monthly
		blog_archive_tmpl_weekly
		blog_archive_tmpl_daily
		blog_archive_tmpl_individual
		blog_archive_tmpl_category
		blog_google_api_key
		blog_sanitize_spec
		blog_cc_license
		blog_is_dynamic
		blog_allow_unreg_comments

Database Table	Description	Fields
		blog_moderate_pings blog_entries_on_index blog_remote_auth_token blog_internal_autodiscovery blog_ping_technorati blog_junk_score_threshold blog_custom_dynamic_templates blog_junk_folder_expiry blog_allow_reg_comments blog_basename_limit blog_manual_approve_commenters blog_allow_pings blog_require_comment_emails blog_children_modified_on blog_moderate_unreg_comments blog_old_style_archive_links
mt_category	Stores information about the categories on the system, what blogs they are attached to, and which author created them.	category_id category_blog_id category_allow_pings category_label category_description category_author_id

Database Table	Description	Fields
		category_ping_urls category_parent
mt_comment	Stores comments and related information, including which blog the comments were posted to and their status.	comment_id comment_blog_id comment_entry_id comment_ip comment_author comment_email comment_url comment_text comment_created_on comment_modified_on comment_created_by comment_modified_by comment_commenter_id comment_junk_score comment_junk_status comment_visible comment_last_moved_on comment_junk_log
mt_config	Stores the version of Movable Type.	config_id config_data

Database Table	Description	Fields
mt_entry	Stores individual entries and associated information, including associated blog, author name, title, status, and creation date.	entry_id entry_blog_id entry_status entry_author_id entry_allow_comments entry_allow_pings entry_convert_breaks entry_category_id entry_title entry_excerpt entry_text entry_text_more entry_to_ping_urls entry_pinged_urls entry_keywords entry_tangent_cache entry_created_on entry_modified_on entry_created_by entry_modified_by entry_atom_id entry_basename

Database Table	Description	Fields
		entry_week_number
mt_fileinfo	Stores information on uploaded files.	fileinfo_id fileinfo_archive_type fileinfo_blog_id fileinfo_category_id fileinfo_entry_id fileinfo_file_path fileinfo_startdate fileinfo_template_id fileinfo_templatemap_id fileinfo_url fileinfo_virtual
mt_ipbanlist	Stores information on banned IP Addresses. Users whose IP address appears in this database table will not be allowed to comment on the blog. This was an early attempt at reducing "blog spam" and other undesired comments.	ipbanlist_id ipbanlist_blog_id ipbanlist_ip ipbanlist_created_on ipbanlist_modified_on ipbanlist_created_by ipbanlist_modified_by
mt_log	Stores activity logs from the	log_id

Database Table	Description	Fields
	Movable Type system.	log_message log_ip log_created_on log_modified_on log_created_by log_modified_by log_blog_id
mt_notification	Stores user information for people who wish to receive updates when a new entry is posted.	notification_id notification_blog_id notification_name notification_email notification_url notification_created_on notification_modified_on notification_created_by notification_modified_by
mt_permissions	Stores permissions for each individual author. This specifies which blogs an individual author can access, and determines the level of access they have to it (can post	permission_id permission_author_id permission_blog_id permission_role_mask permission_entry_prefs

Database Table	Description	Fields
	a new entry, can edit an entry, can delete an entry, etc)	
mt_placement	Stores the associated category of each entry.	placement_id placement_entry_id placement_blog_id placement_category_id placement_is_primary
mt_plugindata	Stores information about any installed plugins on the server.	plugindata_id plugindata_plugin plugindata_key plugindata_data
mt_session	Stores information about the currently logged in user. This reduces access time to user-specific information.	session_data session_email session_id session_kind session_name session_start
mt_tbping	Stores information about trackback pings. Trackbacks are pointers to blogs that have linked to a specific entry within a Movable Type blog.	tbping_id tbping_blog_id tbping_tb_id tbping_title tbping_excerpt

Database Table	Description	Fields
	This helps bloggers see who is linking to their writing quickly.	tbping_source_url tbping_ip tbping_blog_name tbping_created_on tbping_modified_on tbping_created_by tbping_modified_by tbping_junk_score tbping_junk_status tbping_visible tbping_last_moved_on tbping_junk_log
mt_template	Stores template information about a specific blog. This dictates how the blog appears to users viewing it over the web.	template_id template_blog_id template_name template_type template_outfile template_rebuild_me template_text template_linked_file template_linked_file_mtime template_linked_file_size

Database Table	Description	Fields
		template_build_dynamic template_modified_on template_created_on template_modified_by template_created_by
mt_templatemap	Stores information relating the templates to a specific blog and template name.	templatemap_id templatemap_blog_id templatemap_template_id templatemap_archive_type templatemap_file_template templatemap_is_preferred
mt_trackback	Stores additional information about trackbacks.	trackback_id trackback_blog_id trackback_title trackback_description trackback_rss_file trackback_url trackback_entry_id trackback_category_id trackback_passphrase trackback_is_disabled trackback_created_on

Database Table	Description	Fields
		trackback_modified_on trackback_created_by trackback_modified_by

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